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ARTICLES

A NAMUYI TIBETAN BREAST-HEALING RITUAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a breast-healing ritual commonly practiced by Namuyi Tibetans, a little-studied sub-group of Tibetans in the southwest of Sichuan Province, PR China. It seeks to raise awareness of the healing knowledge and traditions of the traditional Namuyi Tibetan secular *nu²¹nu²¹ fu⁵⁴*, a breast-healing ritual generally performed by older women in dealing with swollen breasts and pain during the breastfeeding period. It is considered convenient and practical.

KEYWORDS

Namuyi Tibetan, mythology, women, breast pain, breast healing ritual

INTRODUCTION

The Himalayas are a continuing cradle of mythology and spirituality with a low per capita income and a high population growth rate. Many inhabitants depend on subsistence agriculture. Modern industrial expansion is still lacking. The Himalayas also host the world's three largest traditional medical systems: Ayurvedic, Chinese, and Unani. The use of herbal medicine dates back to the Indus Valley civilization in 2600 BC (Gupta et al. 2014).

Traditional wisdom, based on novelty, adaptation, and experimentation, is orally transmitted from one generation to another and may be methodological, social, organizational, or cultural, attained as experimentation intended for survival. Gupta et al. (2014:vii) comments:

* Lǐ Jiànfù and Yèjìng Zhūmù. 2023. A Namuyi Tibetan Breast-Healing Ritual. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:9-35.

Maintaining good health by making use of traditional curative techniques and using herbs is as old as the history of humanity. Traditional health care systems originated much before the evolution of modern medicines. In some Asian and African countries, 80% of the population depend on traditional medicine for primary health care.

Approximately 5,000 ~ 10,000 Namuyi Tibetans live along the eastern border of the Tibetan plateau (Sūn 1983; Gǔtāo and Wáng 2012), speaking Namuyi k^ha²¹tho²¹, which is classified as Qinangic (Jacques & Michaud 2011). Namuyi Tibetans are mainly distributed in Miǎnníng County, Mùlǐ Tibetan Autonomous County, Jiǔlóng County, and Xīchāng City in China's southwest Sìchuān Province.

The areas where Namuyi Tibetans live today have warm weather with a long growing season with snow once or twice a year. Before 1950, Namuyi Tibetans traditionally lived an agropastoral self-sufficient life. Rice, wheat, corn, barley, tobacco, and beans are locally cultivated; Yaks, cows, goats, water buffalo, horses, pigs, chickens, geese, ducks, mules, and donkeys are raised. Some families earn income by selling livestock, small amounts of grain, and wild mushrooms collected from nearby forests in summer.

In recent years, most young people under fifty, except those attending schools, derive cash income by working on construction crews organized by Hàn Chinese in different parts of China. In 2021, both men and women between the ages of thirty and forty have learned to operate tower cranes and as *xìn hào gōng* 'signal workers' because it is easier compared to extensive physical work and is considered less dangerous than construction work where there are regular reports of deaths from falling off tower cranes or from high buildings under construction.

Namuyi Tibetans speak Namuyi k^ha²¹tho²¹ at home and with other Namuyi Tibetans while speaking fluent Nuòsū with Nuòsū villagers during labor exchange and social events such as weddings and funerals. Sìchuān Chinese dialect is used in business communication with Hàn Chinese in shopping, village business dealings, and construction work outside the village.

The p^ha⁵⁴tsə⁵⁴ is a religious specialist dealing with daily illness issues in Namuyi communities and is usually a male religious

practitioner. The *p^ha⁵⁴tsə⁵⁴* profession is traditionally inherited from one's ancestors. Rituals for issues faced in daily life include rainmaking and human illness. Given the rapid growth and access to modern medicine and hospitals, most families first consult a formally trained doctor. Very few families consider inviting a *p^ha⁵⁴tsə⁵⁴*.

AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The Namuyi secular cultural accounts presented here offer a detailed account of a Namuyi Tibetan breast-healing ritual. Discussions of other Namuyi religious activities may be found in (Gǔtāo and Wáng Déhé 2012; Zhào Lì míng 2016) that have focused on religious figures. This is the first study focusing on hidden cultural aspects practiced and participated in by ordinary locals lacking authority as religious practitioners. First, the breast-healing ritual belongs to secular culture addressing minor breast pain issues considered less important than "big" issues addressed by religious specialists, such as funerals, weddings, life-threatening illnesses, etc. Second, traditionally, women's issues are not openly discussed in public. For instance, it would not be considered negative and humiliating if men observed a woman's exposed breasts while receiving healing treatment.

This study is significant for young local Namuyi in raising awareness and re-evaluating their traditional cultures that have been mislabeled as "not culture," "backward," and "superstitious." In Namuyi communities, villagers often have a "logical" understanding that *Wǒ méi yǒu shàng guò xué, méi yǒu wén huà*, or "I don't have culture (knowledge) because I haven't been to school," including those born before 1960 who know many traditional songs, folktales, hunting skills, and possess skills needed to make farm tools and treat illness. Namuyi locals generally understand the traditional culture as 'outdated' or 'backward' rather than seeing it as "culture" and as significant as the culture and knowledge learned through modern educational institutions. I contend that those extremely knowledgeable of traditional songs and narratives that younger generations know little about are very

knowledgeable and equipped with rich culture.

Many villagers, especially those born before 1980, have negative attitudes toward traditional healing practices. Religious activities, particularly, are seen as *míxìn* superstition by many community members. *Mí* refers to 'a state of confusion', and *xìn* 信 refers to 'an act of belief'. Together, the literal translation refers to someone who 'believes in something with a confused mind'. This is of note from a linguistic perspective. Today, *míxìn* has entered the Namuyi language as a loan word and replaced the original term *mu* or to make a ritual, under the influence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). *Míxìn* is thus a linguistic footprint of a novel understanding of traditional religious culture entering into this community and taking root in people's minds. However, the adoption of this term unconsciously does not mean that it has eliminated traditional and cultural forms of dealing with daily life issues via formal or informal activities because they are deemed effective and practical.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Biomedicine treats breast pain symptoms with hormone therapy and medicines. Griffith et al. (1987) reviewed 350 breast pain patients in City Hospital, Nottingham, UK, finding accurate classification of breast pain syndromes in eighty-nine percent. The most common syndrome was cyclical breast pain, accounting for fifty-four percent of the patients. This study found that accurate classification of breast pain symptoms is key to successful treatment. The largest group of patients were those complaining of cyclical breast pain. Treatment with the antigonadotrophin danazol was effective in sixty-six percent. Still, the rest had to be treated differently due to the reaction of having severe side effects such as headaches, weight gain, or muscle cramps. Griffith et al. (1987:540) pointed out that:

...the aetiology of this condition is unknown, but its clear relationship to the menstrual cycle has pointed to the female sex hormones as being responsible with perhaps an altered sensitivity of the breast as the target organ. The

antigonadotrophin danazol, which also has androgenic properties, was effective in 66% of our patients with this condition whilst the remainder responded to alternative agents.

The study also pointed out that many people think women's breast pain is trivial and unworthy of attention. However, if not handled correctly in time, it may lead to more significant issues such as breast cancer, disturbance of ordinary life, and deteriorating relationships within the family.

In China, breast pain has been examined with clinical experiment-based studies and treated with traditional Chinese therapy. Recovering time ranges approximately from seven days to one month. According to these studies (Huáng 2016; Zhào 2016; Chén 2021; Lǐ 2021, Zhū 2021), it shows effectiveness over various recovery periods. Huáng (2016) found that breast pain was caused by blood and air being blocked in the arteries and veins of the liver and spleen due to unstable emotions during breastfeeding. Huáng and others argue that it is more effective with fewer side effects if breast pain is treated with traditional Chinese therapy, e.g., massage, acupuncture, and traditional herbal medicine. Huáng made his argument based on research on Chinese traditional medicine therapy. His study of wet hot compress therapy (applying wet and hot medicinal herbs on breasts) on sixty patients showed a clinical result of a one hundred percent effectiveness rate after one month of treatment. He proposes that this therapy is an easy, fast, and effective clinical solution without danger and side effects. Chén (2021) conducted an experiment providing self-formulated massage to a group of patients. She concludes the acupuncture-point massage treatment to be effective after comparing the group results with another group that did not receive such massage treatment based on the degree of painfulness, duration of lactation, and quality of sleep. Similar studies on massage treatment also draw positive results by analyzing comparative data between two groups of patients with similar breast pain issues (Lǐ, 2021; Zhū, 2021). Zhào (2016) employed acupuncture (injecting needles in related acupuncture points on both breast areas) on sixty patients selected from the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou University

of Chinese Medicine and recorded an eighty percent effective rate after one month of one treatment daily using VAS evaluation.

Apart from modern hospital and medical machine-dependent research, aspects of folk healing traditions have received attention throughout the Himalayan region. Throughout the Himalayan regions, many folk healing traditions are important in local healthcare, mostly related to the usage of local plant species.

Much attention has been given to local healing traditions in the west of the Himalayas, mainly focusing on healings assisted by knowledge of local plant species. Gupta et al. (1980) extensively explored Ladakh from ethnobotanical and phytochemical points of view, collecting some 800 plant species from different forest ranges, including about 250 medicinal plants used by tribal members, local inhabitants, and folk healers.

In the most western section of the Himalayas in Pakistan, Hamayun (2006) explored the local plants from an ethnobotanical perspective by collecting medical shrubs and trees and identifying their scientific terms. The research attested that 94 plant species were used for medicinal, timber, fuel, fodder, ornamental, agricultural tools, thatching, fencing, naming (folklore), and fruit-yielding purposes.

Three studies were undertaken in Himachal Pradesh from 2004-2011. Samal et al. (2004) researched indigenous healthcare system practices from the bio-resource conservation and socio-development development perspectives. After documenting and studying more than fifty healthcare practices, this research attributed soil erosion and plant extinction to population increases and the large-scale commercial use of bioresources. Interestingly, this study also revealed that females are custodians of the indigenous knowledge system, as fifty-two percent know thirty practices against twenty-six percent of males. Kanwar (2006) made trips to six villages in Kangra District to explore the applications of plants in treating various ailments. By identifying thirty-one plant species used by villagers, the knowledge of indigenous plants is vital for health development workers and local populations. Rawa (2011) specifically studied twenty-two medical plants for gynecological problems involving seventeen families. This study showed evidence

that plants used for gynecological problems are eco-friendly and cost-effective.

South of Himachal Pradesh in Uttarakhand, Tiwari et al. (2010) also explored the plant species by conducting interviews and identifying forty-one plant species of forty genera through field trips from 2006 to 2009. Local people have rich knowledge of using local plants. Namely, the forty plant species were used for food, fodder, medicine, and other purposes. The study also calls attention to developing an adequate strategy and action plan for conserving and managing habitats and species.

In the Mornaula Reserve Forest of Kumoun et al. (2010) observed and explored indigenous knowledge by collecting and identifying 337 local plants and their names from nine villages. These plants are used as medicine, edible food, fuel, fodder, timber, and fiber, and in agricultural and religious ceremonies.

South of the Himalayan region in Nepal, Kunwar and Bussmann (2008) conducted 264 studies focusing on ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, and diversity of medicinal and aromatic plants carried out between 1970 and 2006. Field trips were made to seven districts of west Nepal for cross-checking and verifying different plant species. It found as much as fifty-five percent of the flora from the study region had medicinal value. According to the research, the authors advocate that indigenous knowledge is culturally valued and scientifically important.

Medicinal plants in the east Himalayan regions have received some attention. Srivastave and Kapahi (1991) studied about 400 plant species of medicinal and aromatic values in the Sikkim Himalayas. It was concluded that people in this area see their local healing practice as practical. Acharyya and Sharma (2004) studied thirty-five medicinal plants from thirty-five genera in Assam. Interviews and recordings with ten healers were used for analysis. The research showed that most of the recipes are prepared with wild plants. Local people prefer folk medicine for its low cost and as part of their social life and culture. Kala (2005) investigated 158 medicinal plants used by the Apatani Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, who cultivate wet-rice. Fifty-two types of ailments were cured by the 158 plant species distributed across seventy-three

families and 124 genera. It was concluded from the research that local people's strong dependence on nature had developed a rich knowledge system which ultimately is reflected in the forms of their traditional culture, religion, local belief, folklore, taboo language, and dialects.

The studies of the west and east of the Himalayas discussed above focus on traditional healing practices using knowledge of local plant species from an ethnobotanical point of view.

More importantly, two points should be noted for all the many publications and studies discussed. First, these studies have focused on modern medicine and the traditional utilization of locally grown plants and herbs in healing. The first is modern-hospital-based, and the latter is on natural villages and communities in the Himalayas. Second, these scholars do not note the aspect of spiritual curing involving spiritual healers. Healing practices involving chanting - practiced by Namuyi Tibetans - are yet to be explored.

Gurmet (2004) provided an introductory history note, theory, and practice of Tibetan *gso ba rig pa*, known as Amchi medicine, practiced in Ladhak, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Tibetan settlements in other areas in India. According to the classical Tibetan medicine Textbook, *Rgyud bzhi*, animate and inanimate phenomena are composed of the five elements — earth, water, fire, wind, and space — due to the Karma of all living beings. Ignorance causes three basic roots of sickness - '*dod chags* 'desire/lust' is the root cause of *rlung* 'air', *zhe sdang* 'anger' is the root cause of *mkhris pa* 'bile', and *gti mug* 'mental darkness' is the root cause of *pad kan* 'phlegm'. Physicians and the behavior and conduct of physicians and patients are primarily based on these Buddhist principles. Therefore, a Buddhist tantra and mantra ritual plays a critical role in treating patients.

Himalayan communities invite spiritual healers for opinions and to cure ailments caused by supernatural entities. Spiritual healers play various roles - priests, social workers, friends, advisors, husbands, wives, etc. They are invited to perform rituals, but at the same time, they lead an everyday life engaged in daily life activities as other community members.

METHODOLOGY: OBSERVING AND DESCRIBING THE RITUAL

This paper is based on the author's local knowledge, recordings, and online video chat interviews. The foundation of this study is based on the author's local knowledge as a native Namuyi and a special relationship with the ritual healer - the main interviewee. The author is the interviewee's son and was raised in Dàshuǐ village. He witnessed and observed the procedure of breast-healing practices since childhood. In addition, three hours of recorded materials from the healer were made in the winters of 2018, 2019, and 2020.

Meanwhile, the author's younger sister visited and interviewed three patients (to avoid discomfort from discussions about the topic with a male interviewer) who received treatments from the healer in recent years in Dàshuǐ. According to the interview recordings, the ritual process, method, and experiences (personal accounts) of studying the ritual were written in Xíníng City, where the author currently works. In writing the paper, the author had regular video chats with the healer via WeChat when necessary.

According to observations, recordings, and interviews, the breast-healing ritual is described below in terms of background, the patient's symptoms, and the healer and her learning and practice experiences.

RITUAL BACKGROUND

Rituals in Namuyi communities fall into two categories, a secular form or a less complex version and a formal ritual form that involves laborious preparations. When the situation is not severe, the secular form could be done by anyone, either man or woman. In contrast, the formal one must be conducted by a p^ha⁵⁴tsə⁵⁴ involving selecting an auspicious date, chanting mountain deity invitations, animal blood sacrifices, traditional religious tools (drums, cymbals, and *gtor ma*, and chanting. Some rituals require five to ten hours, and some, such as funerals, last one to two days with close relatives and villagers invited to help due to the amount of work.

Some secular ritual forms have no standard forms, and vice versa. For example, a secular *ka²¹ɟy²¹bu³⁴* ritual takes only about fifteen minutes. It is done for persistent dizziness and vomiting. However, if the symptoms persist for weeks and months, plus often dreaming of cats and dogs, a formal *ka²¹ɟy²¹pi²¹* ritual is conducted by a religious specialist. In contrast, certain formal rituals lack secular forms. For instance, there is only a formal ritual for either man or woman experiencing infertility. Complaints measured and understood in different levels of severity have two ritual forms. If illness symptoms are perceived from a comparative perspective, there are two comparative forms for secular and religious adherents.

The secular ritual forms fall into two categories, *bu³³* 'chanting loudly' and *sa²¹ŋa²¹* 'whispering chants' 'quiet ritual'. The first type of associated illnesses is believed to be caused by spirits or deities outside the patient's body, so chanting must be loud enough to appease them. The second type of ritual is for illnesses believed to be caused by energy from the patient's inner body. Therefore, the healer must whisper the healing chanting in front of the patient. The issues or illnesses associated with *sa²¹ŋa²¹* rituals are dust in the eyes, fishbones or sharp bits of wood stuck in the throat, burns or hot water scalds, and breast pain.

The term *sa²¹ŋa²¹* in Namuyi *k^ha²¹t^ho²¹* is related to the Tibetan *gsang sngags* where *gsang* is 'secret' 'secret speech', and '*sngags* is 'to praise' 'to purify'. The term refers to 'tantra and tantric teaching and practices or Vajrayāna', a tempting but challenging practice of Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhism involving a male and a female practitioner. This appealing surface level suggests that the Namuyi *k^ha²¹t^ho²¹* '*sa²¹ŋa²¹*' is a borrowed word from Tibetan or influenced by Tibetan Buddhism.

An alternative linguistic possibility is '*sa²¹ŋa²¹*', referring to 'to chant or to cure'. Separate meanings attached to '*ŋa²¹*' are unknown, but '*sa²¹*' refers to 'breath or air' corresponding to the Tibetan '*gsung*' 'speech'. Of note is 'breath' in neighboring Nuòsū is '*so⁵⁴*', distinguished by its vowels and tones. However, the author did not observe a related practice among Nuòsū communities. Namuyi *k^ha²¹t^ho²¹* is currently understood as a high coda erosion

language and other Naic languages (Nàxī, Mósuō, Lìsù, Ěrsū, etc.; Jacques & Michaud, 2011). Consistently dropping the nasal /ŋ/ and alveolar /g/ in Namuyi $k^ha^{21}t^ho^{21}$ 'sa²¹ŋa²¹ might be evidence of coda erosion. The linguistic phenomenon and its related evidence challenge the idea that the term sa²¹ŋa²¹ in Namuyi $k^ha^{21}t^ho^{21}$ is borrowed. Instead, it triggers questions about relations between Namuyi $k^ha^{21}t^ho^{21}$ and Tibetan and neighboring Nàxī and Mósuō languages.

THE $n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ RITUAL

$n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ is a secular sa²¹ŋa²¹ ritual form that does not require a religious specialist. It involves a female healer and a patient. A woman is preferred because the patient sits before the healer and exposes her breasts during the ritual. In contrast to the formal rituals, the $n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ ritual does not require particular religious implements, an astrologically calculated date, or a specific setting or location. The most crucial part is that the patient must find a healer who knows the sa²¹ŋa²¹ and related procedures. The ritual could be undertaken where the two meet.

$n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ is the only Namuyi ritual requiring a female performer. It is learned and practiced only by Namuyi Tibetan women. However, beneficiaries are not limited by cultural or ethnic boundaries. In Dàshuǐ 大水 Village, Namuyi and Nuòsū patients with swollen breast issues benefit from Namuyi Tibetan ritual performers. Nuòsū performers of the $n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ ritual are unknown.

THE PATIENT AND SYMPTOMS

The $n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ 'breast healing ritual' is performed when a woman experiences swollen breasts and pain during the breastfeeding period. Traditionally, Namuyi women marry between the ages of eighteen and thirty. The $n_u^{21}n_u^{21}fu^{54}$ ritual plays a significant role for these women in this age range.

According to a commentary on the Tibetan classical medical work *Gso rig rgyud bzhi'i 'grel chen drang srong zhal lung* (Khro

ru tshe rnam 2014:285-286), the human body is composed of five elements - earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Breast pain, termed *nu tshabs*, is one of ten illnesses caused by hot menstrual blood being forced into parts of the body by *rlung* 'wind' 'breath of the respiratory system' is explained as the result of irregular abruption of menstruation arrival. The ten body areas where menstrual blood may be concentrated are *glo ba* 'lungs', *snying* 'heart', *mchin pa* 'liver', *mtsher ma* 'spleen', *mkhris pa* 'gall bladder', *mkhal ma* 'kidneys', *rgyu ma* 'intestines', *'o ma* 'milk', *nu ma* 'breasts', and *khrag* 'blood'. Menstrual blood forced into veins may concentrate in any of the mentioned parts. Of which the breast area is one part. If menstrual blood concentrates in the breast area, women will then feel great pain in this area. The same book describes the symptom as *nu tshabs nu ma skrang shing zug gzer che* (Khro ru tshe rnam 2014:286) or 'the breasts become swollen with enormous pain due to disturbance of the menstrual blood'.

Interestingly, the understanding of the symptom of breast pain from a Tibetan medicine perspective resonates with the explanation of biomedicine study and explanation as 'mastalgia' (Antonio and Frederick, 2002; Griffith et al. (1987) in which breast pain is mainly understood as cyclical and triggered by disturbance of menstrual period blood.

THE METHOD: BREAST-BLOWING

The actual ritual of breast-blowing occurs where the patient locates the healer inside a house or outside at a random location and lasts approximately fifteen minutes. It involves only the healer and the patient. The method includes exposing the patient's breasts, whispering the tantra, and blowing on the breasts. The patient sits in front of the healer and exposes her breasts to receive the healing. First, the healer holds her right hand in a fist shape but leaves a moderate hollow space where she can whisper into. Next, she puts her fist (with a moderate hollow space) before her mouth. Then, she whispers the tantra into the hollow part of her right hand. After one round of whispering tantra, she blows on the patient's breasts three times with a little saliva. This procedure is repeated three times, at

which point the patient can cover her chest.

An alternative may be performed in the absence of the patient. If the patient has much breast pain and cannot come to the healer, the healer whispers into a cup (or another small container that is convenient to carry) of plain water. This cup of water is then given to the patient to drink. This is not considered as ineffective as when the patient is present.

The healer does not touch the patient. It is believed that healing power is transmitted from whispering the tantra through air energy created via blowing and saliva. Anyone may observe the entire ritual process. The most crucial part, the whispering of the chant, should not be heard to be effective. Observers may witness the healer blowing on the breasts and detect whispering but cannot hear the actual words. Keeping the healing technique secret is common in Himalayan healing traditions. In the healing process involving ritual and herbal medicines in the Himachal area of the northwestern Himalayas, 'Healers believe that the efficacy of the medicine is lost if its formulation is exposed to strangers' (Gupta 2014).

THE HEALER: mbzə³³mu³⁴

Traditionally, the ɲu²¹ɲu²¹ fu⁵⁴ ritual is generally performed by an elder woman in Dàshuǐ village, usually a woman who has given birth to children without any modern education background. mbzə³³mu³⁴, female, b. 1943, the author's mother was born in ka²¹pʰæ²¹tu²¹ Village until she married at about eighteen, near Dàshuǐ Village, where she lives now. She attended a local primary school for two years. She confided, "My parents didn't permit me to attend school, so I told them that I was going to work in the field, then I hid my mattock behind a grave and went to register. Later, they allowed me to continue when they learned what I was doing." Apart from Namuyi kʰa²¹tʰo²¹, she is fluent in Nuòsū. She communicates well with Chinese businesspeople who come to the village and in Lǐzhōu town but lacks confidence when speaking with people speaking Chinese in other Chinese varieties.

In the 2021 summer holiday, the author interviewed

mbzə³³mu³⁴ at her home in Dàshuǐ. She described her experiences of learning and reciting the ritual words:

Account One

I learned *ŋ²¹u²¹ŋ²¹fu⁵⁴* from my father when I was seventeen or eighteen. He knew many *sa²¹ŋa²¹* about healing and, at that time, was about sixty. He makes corn liquor by himself and, every night, enjoys a cup of the liquor he made while sitting by the hearth. It makes him feel good and relaxed from the day's hard labor. He was very clear-minded and not drunk. I learned all kinds of *sa²¹ŋa²¹* during those years with my elder sister under my father's encouragement. We simply sat around the hearth under the dim light of pine resin burning and repeated after my father. We first repeated and memorized word by word, then gradually, sentence by sentence. We didn't have a cell phone like you do today to record it simultaneously. We had to remember it word by word and sentence by sentence slowly for years.

My elder sister was upset because she could not memorize as fast as I could. She learned some at the beginning, but later she gave it up. I got more encouraged because my elder sister gave up due to bad memory. I learned successfully and started healing problems when I was about twenty or maybe twenty-one. I cannot remember now.

My father continually reminds us, "Who will solve these problems after I die?" We would spend the night with my father around the hearth whenever we didn't have to grind corn into meal with a hand mill. In those times, we did not have machines like nowadays. We girls would have to grind corn or beans every two or three days to feed family members and pigs.

According to her memory, apart from the ritual for swollen breasts, she also learned other oral chants to deal with daily problems. Currently, the secular ritual chanting that knows and practices are for fish bones stuck in the throat or tiny sharp wooden thorns eaten and swallowed accidentally, swollen tumor or *na²¹bu³⁴* 'inflammation', and burned or scalded skin. When asked about past examples of healing women's breasts, mbzə³³mu³⁴ provided the following two accounts:

Account Two

About twenty years ago, I remember healing Koko's swollen breast. She was dying from the pain. She lived just right across the other side of the river, and it took about half an hour to walk there. It was the time of roosters crowing, and I was still in bed. Her mother's fierce calling at our gate woke me from my dream. I dressed and found her mother standing at our door entrance with a burning torch in her right hand. She said, "Please come and blow on my daughter's breasts. She couldn't sleep all last night. I already borrowed a horse from *gu*²¹*gy*³⁴, my neighbor. If your treatment doesn't work, we will have to take her to a hospital in *o*⁵⁴*ndro*⁵⁴¹," She was anxious and could not stop talking. We walked on the ridge between the terrace fields under the dim light of a dry rice straw torch and arrived at her place after about twenty minutes.

I heard Koko groaning in pain as we entered the house. She was lying in bed with a quilt under her back and could not stop groaning. "She was in pain since after dinner last night and got worse after midnight," Koko's mother explained, sitting by her daughter. Her father was preparing to put her on a horse and head to the hospital right after my treatment. I told her mother to expose her breasts and started chanting and blowing on both her breasts. It was done quickly, and as soon as I finished, her mother covered her breasts with a quilt. After talking to her mother, Koko was deeply asleep after a few minutes. Her father waited, thinking of going to the hospital after Koko woke up. She woke up and recovered after about an hour. Their anxiety was relieved, and they returned the horse to the *gu*²¹*gy*³⁴ family that morning.

Account Three

Different women have different experiences. Some recover after one round of treatment, whereas some recover after two or three rounds. The most recent case I remember is the wife of our neighbor Hăinăi Niúniú. She had breast pain three years ago. She visited me only twice, and I was expecting a third visit, but not long after, she told me that her breasts had recovered. Since then, they have been very nice to me. The couple came to help me harvest corn and transplant rice in the past few years. Every time they come, they say, 'Odzu Ama cured my illness²!' Ha, ha, ha... This year, I guess I also need their help in harvesting corn.

Regarding efficacy, *mbzə*³³*mu*³⁴ declares all the patients she has

¹ *o*⁵⁴*ndro*⁵⁴ refers to Xīchāng City.

² *Odzu* refers to 'Tibetan' and *ama* refers to women over fifty.

consulted were cured by her ritual. She doesn't remember a single case where the ritual didn't work.

RITUAL CHANTING

The chanting is only supposed to be whispered by the healer quietly. It is believed that the chanting will not be efficacious if the patients and others hear it. The chanting itself is only about three minutes. However, the preparation takes approximately fifteen minutes for whisper chanting, blowing on the breasts three times after each complete chant, and three repetitions of the same process. The author transcribed mbzə³³mu³⁴'s chanting into IPA from an iPhone 8 audio recording. The healer reluctantly agreed to chant loudly for recording since she believes the chanting should be kept secret except when training new disciples.

Two points should be made about the chanting. Firstly, the actual meanings of these chants are unknown. The healer never asked about the meaning of the chanting words. Patients also do not ask questions, but they do care about the efficacy of the ritual. The patients consider the meanings of these sounds to have mystic qualities and that it is inappropriate to question them. Secondly, a clear history of the chanting ritual is also unknown to the healer and the local people. The healer is also not taught the meanings of these chanting words, recites the chants, and performs the ritual for patients.

A corresponding helpful instance might be the chanting phenomenon in Buddhism. Tibetan monks traditionally play a crucial role in people's daily life. They are often invited to healing occasions to chant related chanting. Buddhists believe chanting the six-syllable mantra, *Om Mani Pademe Hum*, by ordinary people has healing power. It calls upon the Medicine Buddha, who blesses medicines and produces healing effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All three patients in Dàshuǐ Village responded positively and were grateful that their issues were solved, corresponding to the healer's memories. While being interviewed, the healer indicated that she does not remember any patients who came for treatments that were not healed after performing the ritual. She further explained that most patients were healed in one visit, although some required two or three visits.

The concept of disease and treatment, life and death in various traditions and cultures is as varied as their cultures. Modern science is based on theories and principles, while indigenous knowledge systems rely on values, beliefs, and customs. According to Western thought, the body is considered a complex machine that must be kept "geared-up" and sickness is taken to be the breakdown of the machine. This differs from Eastern thinking, in which health is considered a balance between the physical, social, and supernatural environments. Biomedicine is based on the "body-as-machine" metaphor, which has formed the basis of biomedicine medicine.

In contrast, performing complex rituals accompanied by chanting is based on the belief that the human body is closely interconnected with an invisible metaphysical world or world of supernatural beings and gods. Despite various religions and cultures, the power of ritual healing is frequently attributed to certain forms of supernatural beings or mythical healing deities. For instance, Asklepius is the ancient Greek God of healing, Ah Kin is the Sun God who is prayed to at sunrise and invoked to cure disease, Ebisu is the Japanese God of medicine and good health, and Lǚ Dòngbīn is a historical figure and a deity revered by many Chinese Taoists to maintain health (Gupta et al., 2014). However, the source of the healing power is not identifiable with the practitioners and individuals in the cultures above.

International studies suggest that it is easier for women to recover and restore body energy from postpartum issues if they have strong cultural healing traditions. Various studies have described traditional beliefs and practices surrounding

childbearing and effective traditional prenatal and postpartum practices (Raven et al. 2007). Women who observe cultural traditions and have strong gendered kin support express fewer symptoms of postpartum depression, quickly restore bodily energy and experience a healthy life with their newborns.

The breast healing ritual in Dàshuǐ Village serves a similar purpose and affects local women's breastfeeding. It is practical and straightforward, considering aspects of various abovementioned treatments, i.e., Biomedicine treatments and acupuncture massage. The breast healing ritual has advantages in the time required, process, location, and efficacy. Regarding the length of treatment, biomedicine medicine treatment of breast pain may require more than a year. In contrast, treatment with Chinese traditional medicine in a combination of Biomedicine science involving herbal medicine and acupuncture massage generally requires at least one month. The Namuyi Tibetan breast ritual takes approximately fifteen minutes per treatment. Some women were healed after one session with the healer, while others required two or three sessions.

In terms of process and treatment location, modern medicine and traditional Chinese acupuncture and massage require more procedures in a professional hospital or a clinic where both require an interview, check-ups (e.g., blood tests), drug prescriptions, etc. The Namuyi Tibetan ritual simply involves a patient and a healer at a location wherever they meet.

The research above suggests that biomedical treatments have difficulties reaching one hundred percent effectiveness regarding efficacy. Chinese traditional treatments seem to have a relatively higher rate. The Namuyi healer reported no case that a patient was not healed by rituals she conducted.

Cost is another important consideration in determining treatment behavior. The Namuyi breast ritual does not require specific payments, though patients commonly buy a bottle of liquor or offer one or two days of free labor (crop harvest, rice transplanting, weeding, etc.) to express gratitude.

CONCLUSION

The breast-healing ritual is a component of the Namuyi Tibetan culture system that includes, among others, religion, customs, folklore, and oral history. It has been practiced, evolved, and inherited over multiple generations as a system. Similar to many other aboriginal societies, as Gupta (2014:137) puts it:

Traditional wisdom evolved from close interdependence between the knowledge and geographical and social-cultural milieu of aboriginal societies and its oral propagation. Rules regarding its privacy and inviolability governed the management of these systems. Maintaining good health by employing folk therapeutic procedures and utilizing herbs is as old as the history of humanity. Traditional health care systems have evolved even much before the development of modern medicine...

Traditional knowledge is embedded in experience and observation and often hidden in folklore, oral tradition, myths, legends, ceremonies, and songs. Such knowledge often lacks scientific credentials and may be ignored, stressing the need to document and preserve continuing use for humankind's betterment. Safeguarding traditional knowledge and its cultural and ecological resource base is crucial in globalization's full-throated demands and the ever-increasing demand for natural resources. Constant changes in the economy, therapy, technology, and medical insurance provided by the government influence how communities view, seek, and respond to medical care.

With an increasing number of Namuyi leaving the village for higher incomes in tandem with China's Nine-year Education Policy, only a handful of elders remain in the village caring for children and family members. Most prefer consulting modern science for solutions to solving daily ailments rather than inviting traditional community healers.

Finally, can modern Biomedical and traditional healing scientists and scholars integrate the two, creating a holistic body of knowledge for disease and ailment treatment within the realm of modern biomedical notions, and if so, how?

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PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The west of Dàshuǐ Village (13 March 2013, Li Jianfu).



2. The south of Dàshuǐ Village (22 March 2013, Li Jianfu).



3. The healer, mbzə³³mu³⁴, with rice seedling beds in the north of Dàshuǐ Village (13 March 2013).



4. mbzə³³mu³⁴ casts rice seed (13 March 2013, Li Jianfu).



TIBETAN TERMS

'dod chags འདོད་ཆགས།

'sanj, gsung གསུང་།

glo ba གློ་བ།

gsang sngags གསང་སྟགས།

gso rig rgyud bzhi'i 'grel chen

གསོ་རིག་རྒྱུད་བཞིའི་འགྲེལ་ཆེན་

gso ba rig pa གསོ་བ་རིག་པ།

gti mug གཏི་མུག་

gtor ma གཏོར་མ།

khrag ཁྲག་

khro ru tshe rnam ཁྲོ་རུ་ཙེ་རྟགས།

Mahāyāna མཐའ་ལྷན་, theg pa chen

པོ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

mchin pa མཆོན་པ།

mkhal ma མཁལ་མ།

mkhris pa མཁྲིས་པ།

mtsher ma མཚེར་མ།

nu ma ལུ་མ།

nu tshabs ལུ་ཚབས།

o ma འོ་མ།

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM

ཨོ་མ་ཎི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ།

pad kan པད་ཀན།

rgyu ma རྒྱུ་མ།

rgyud bzhi རྒྱུད་བཞི།

rlung རྩུང་།

skrang སྐངས།

snying སྟིང་།

spyen ras gzigs སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་

Vajrayāna བརྒྱུད་ལྷན་, rdo rje theg

པ་རྫོག་ཐེག་པ་

zhe sdang ཞེ་སྟང་།

zug gzer che ལུག་གཟེར་ཆེ།

CHINESE TERMS

Chén Chángxiá 陈常霞
 Dàshuǐ 大水
 Ěrsū 尔苏
 Gǔtāo 古涛
 Hǎinǎi Niúniú 海乃牛牛
 Hàn 汉
 Huángqiǎo 黄巧
 Jiǔlóng 九龙
 Lí Jiànfù 李建富
 Lǐ Jūnmǐn 李君敏
 Lìsù 傈僳
 Lǐzhōu 礼州
 Lǚ Dòngbīn 吕洞宾
 méi yǒu 没有
 Miǎnníng 冕宁
 míxìn 迷信
 Mósuō 摩梭
 Mùlǐ 木里

Nàmùyī 纳木依
 Nàxī 纳西
 Nuòsū 诺苏
 Qīnghǎi 青海
 Qīnghǎi Normal University,
 Qīnghǎi Shīfàn Dàxué
 青海师范大学
 Sìchuān 四川
 shàng xué 上学
 Sūn Hóngkāi 孙宏开
 Wáng Déhé 王德和
 wén huà 文化
 wǒ 我
 Xīchāng 西昌
 xìn hào gōng 信号工
 Xīníng 西宁
 Yèjìng Zhūmù 叶静珠穆
 Zhào Lì míng 赵丽明
 Zhào Wěixuán 赵玮璇
 Zhū Wèipíng 朱卫平

TRADITIONAL TIBETAN SONGS, INSTRUMENTS,
AND A *DMANGS GLU* SINGER IN
MDO BA (DUOWA) TOWN, MTSHO SNGON
(QINGHAI) PROVINCE, PR CHINA

Chos skyong skyabs ཆོས་སྒྱུང་སྒྱུབ་པ། (Qiejiangjia 切江加)*,¹

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on pastoral Mdo ba (Duowa) Town, Thun rin (Tongren) City, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. I examine my personal experiences related to local *dmangs glu* and *la ye*, traditional songs (*dmangs glu/glu* 'folk songs', *la ye (la gzhas)* 'love songs', and *rdung len* 'singing with Tibetan lute and mandolin'), local musical instruments (*sgra snyan* 'mandolin', *mnga' ris sgra snyan* 'Tibetan lute', and *gling bu* 'flute'), a local *dmangs glu* singer (Sgrol ma skyabs, b. 1978), and the results of surveys on attitudes toward traditional Tibetan songs among locals in Mdo ba Town and students in a boarding primary school in a pastoral area in Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. Five photographs are included.

KEYWORDS

Tibetan traditional songs, Tibetan folk songs, herding life, Tibetan Plateau, Tibetan song culture, *dmangs glu* (folksongs), Tibetan *rdung len*, Tibetan love songs

* Chos skyong skyabs. 2023. Traditional Tibetan Songs, Instruments, and a *Dmangs glu* Singer in Mdo ba (Duowa) Town, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:36-97.

¹ I thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

THE SETTING

ONE: LO SAR 'TIBETAN NEW YEAR' 2005

On the fifth day of Lo sar, I¹ (b. 1994) was waiting for my cousin and friend, Gnam thar tshe ring² (b. 1991), at my home in my family's winter pasture. Gnam thar tshe ring lived with his family only a half-kilometer away, but we couldn't see each other's homes because a small hill was between our adobe houses. I was ready to start to Sgrol ma skyabs'³ (b. 1978) home, dressed in my best clothes - old blue jeans that my mother had washed before Lo sar, so they looked almost new, and my newest Tibetan brown robe. My three-year-old black knee-high leather boots also looked new, as I only wore them on special days. They were tight and hurt my feet if I walked very far.

Before Gnam thar tshe ring arrived, Mother said, "Please go the day after tomorrow, or I'll worry about you two. It's not safe. Listen! There are many homeless dogs near the Town Center. Uncle Brtan pa isn't available today, but he can take you guys to Sgrol ma skyabs' home the day after tomorrow."

"Gnam thar tshe ring and I already decided to visit today, and Sgrol ma skyabs must be waiting for us now," I replied.

About ten minutes later, Gnam thar tshe ring appeared and suggested we leave. Sgrol ma skyabs' home is nine kilometers from our winter pasture home. Gnam thar tshe ring and I visit him annually on the fifth or sixth days of the New Year.

We walked for about a half-hour and then stopped a man on a motorcycle. "May we ride behind you, please?" I asked the driver.

"Boys, where are you going?" he asked.

After learning our destination, he told us to hop on. A short time later, he dropped us off at the Town Center,⁴ two kilometers

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the first person references in this paper indicate Chos skyong skyabs.

² Gnam thar tshe ring and Sgrol ma skyabs are my maternal grandfather's (Gcod las, b. 1937) older brother's son's sons.

³ The names of this man and his family members have been changed.

⁴ See <https://bit.ly/3L77Nsa> 10 September 2022 for a ten-minute video of the Town Center in 2019. Mdo ba Township 'xiang' became a town

from Sgrol ma skyabs' home. We then walked, eager to enjoy Sgrol ma skyabs' hospitality and hear his songs.

"Ao na ye ..." Sgrol ma skyabs sang a *sgrung glu* 'epic song'¹ when he saw us, a greeting different from others we knew.

The next section describes my personal experiences with love songs.

TWO: LOVE SONG GATHERINGS

Two gatherings are described. The first is an example of a local camp gathering held in 2003 and earlier, according to traditional practice. The second describes activity at *na chung rtse* 'love song clubs' in the Mbo ba Town Center. In 2022, neither of these types of gatherings was held.

Local Camp Gathering

My earliest memory of local love song gatherings was in 2003 when I was nine. About ten families were in the summer pasture in white canvas tents arranged fifty to one hundred meters apart in a line just north of a small stream. Food at around nine PM was generally noodles cooked with yak meat. After eating, some local teenagers and young unmarried adults shouted, signaling a night gathering. My mother didn't allow me to attend.

However, once in the seventh lunar month in 2003, after being told I was too young, I slipped away from my family tent and attended one of these night gatherings. There were about fifteen attendees, both males and females. I followed them to a small valley surrounded by mountains where a small stream flowed. The upper part of the valley was narrow, while the shady lower side was wide and covered by dense rhododendrons. We went into the valley to a point where we couldn't see our tents, and our family members couldn't hear us. We made a small fire with rhododendron bushes and sat on the grass-covered ground with girls on one side and boys

'zhen' in 2014 <https://bit.ly/3DFKD8Z> 4 November 2022).

¹ Sgrol ma skyabs sang Ge sar epic songs he heard and learned from the radio beginning in about 2005.

on the other. I sat next to one of my cousins. Boys flirted with girls who giggled and sometimes loudly laughed as they responded when boys whistled and pulled their clothes.

Several minutes later, the boys' side began singing *la ye* (*la gzhas*) songs, and the girls sang back. The gathering was full of excited laughter as the singers communicated and flirted through *la ye*.

By the time I was a teenager, most families had radio-tape players bringing singing into homes in ways that had never occurred before. Singing was now immediately available at the touch of a button, and songs on tapes could be played repeatedly. Additionally, most children attended school. There were no more gatherings as described above.

Na chung rtsed ra 'Love Song Clubs'

Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, I frequently went to *na chung rtsed ra* 'love song clubs' at night, the only activity centers in the local township town. Locals operated three such clubs in the township town. They opened around seven PM and closed early the next morning. I most frequently attended Klu mo's Club next to the main road in an old concrete block building with a tile roof. The three clubs had no names or signboards. They were distinguished only by their managers' names.¹ (This was all local knowledge.)

You entered Klu mo's Club through a small wooden door from the main road. Inside were two rooms. The entry room had a billiard table, no windows, and a doorway that opened into a second, slightly larger room. The ceiling of this inner room was decorated with colorful cloth and had a rotating disco-ball light. Chinese-language newspapers covered the upper part of the walls. A metal stove that burned yak-dung and coal was in the room center. Three or four long wooden benches and tables were near the walls.

¹ The other two clubs were referred to as Sangs rgyas' Club and Rta kho's Club.

Klu mo, a local woman in her twenties, sang *la ye* very well and managed the club. She sold Tsingtao and Snowflake beer, Sprite, Pepsi, cigarettes, and instant noodles. Typically, the club was frequented by about thirty locals under forty (married and unmarried), including some ten women, who came at night, drank, and listened to *la ye*. Local men came to the club with long knives in sheaths attached to their sashes and *mgo skor* 'dog-beaters'.¹ The club typically closed when intoxicated customers began fighting.

Usually, around nine PM, Klu mo would sing *rtse mgo* 'beginning' and then hand the microphone and a *kha btags* 'silk strip' to a man. Klu mo and the man would sing antiphonally before others sang.

The love song clubs had shut down by 2011. By then, TV and cell phones were very ordinary, and locals had lost interest in these clubs to have fun and meet each other. Another reason was a local resident opened a tea house in our township town in 2010. Tea houses soon replaced the love song clubs. Local young people were more attracted to the tea houses with their interior decorations and comfortable sofas and tables. It was also a place to drink beer and gamble by 2011. The local love song clubs could not compete.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines traditional Tibetan songs and instruments based on Yo lag (Zhiyu) Village,² Mdo ba Town,³ Thun rin City, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province, PR China. I specifically investigate local traditional songs (*dmangs glu* or *glu* 'folk songs', *la ye* 'love songs', and *rdung len* 'sung with Tibetan lute and mandolin'); descriptions of local musical

¹ Locals use dog-beaters in fights with others and when attacked by dogs (hence the name). The local version is a piece of yak-leather one to two meters long and about one centimeter wide. At the end is affixed a piece of metal. The dog-beater is whirled to injure an enemy or a dog with the metal at the end of the leather strip.

² Yo lag was officially classified as a *cun* 'village' and was at 35°27'16"N, 102°22'96"E.

³ Mdo ba was home to 1,419 households (7,291 people) in 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3Oln6PA> 18 November 2022).

instruments (*sgra snyan* 'mandolin', *mnga' ris sgra snyan* ¹ 'Tibetan lute', and *gling bu* 'flute'); the results of two inquiries into the current *dmangs glu* situation in Mdo ba and Sder nang (De'ang); ² certain of my personal experiences related to local *dmangs glu* and *la ye* songs; *dmangs glu* preservation efforts in the Mtsho sngon area; and Sgrol ma skyabs' life story and songs. Sgrol ma skyabs is locally recognized for singing at *khang ston* 'new house celebrations', when *gya ston* 'eighty-year-old celebrations' were held for local elders, and particularly for singing responses to what others sang at *bag ston* 'local weddings'. Sgrol ma skyabs' life experiences and family background characterize a traditional local family. Between 5 February and 7 March 2022, I visited his home, as mentioned at the start of this article, and his winter pasture home in Yo lag Village. I collected more information, recorded the interviews, and translated portions of the audio material into English. Four of Sgrol ma skyabs' *dmangs glu* are provided as performed (Wylie and Tibetan script), in literary poetic text (Wylie and Tibetan script), and in English translation. Additional material includes four maps offering a broader context for the A mdo (Anduo) pastoral songscape.

In 2022, Yo lag had a population of about 262 households (1,315 people). It was in the southeast of Rma lho Prefecture, bordering Bsang chu (Xiahe) County, Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kan su'u (Gansu) Province. Most residents were herders, and at this time, income was primarily from selling livestock and caterpillar fungus.

¹ *Mnga' ris sgra snyan* 'Ngari's lute'.

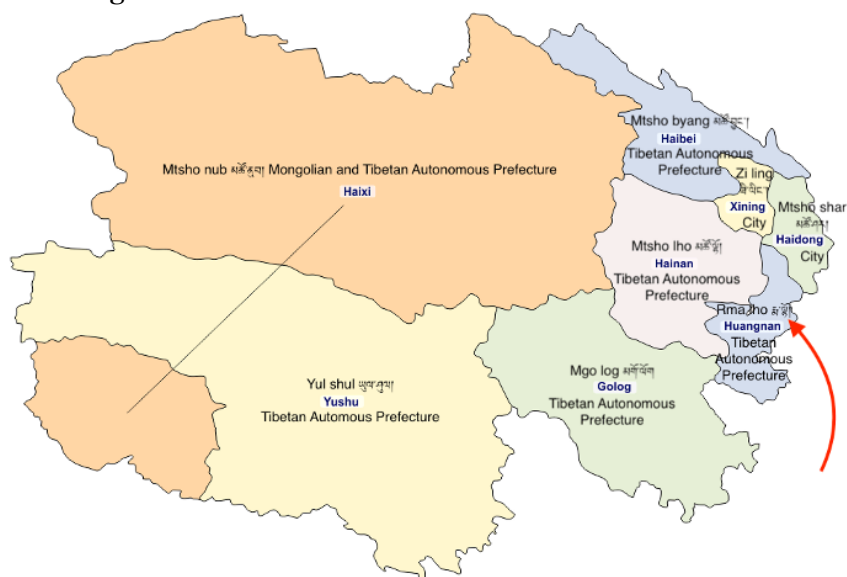
² Located in Dar lag (Dari) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mstho sngon Province.

MAPS

PR China.¹



Mtsho sngon Province.²



¹ An edited version of <https://bit.ly/3izeNnb> 6 December 2022.

² An edited version of <https://bit.ly/3B8qoSj> 6 December 2022.

Thun rin City.¹



¹ An edited version of <https://bit.ly/3xHEoiF> 21 September 2022.

Yo lag Village.¹



LOCAL TRADITIONAL SONGS

Drawing on the literature, I describe terms for *dmangs glu/glu*, *la ye*, and *rdung len* in this section. Ethnographic accounts of usage and understandings of these terms from Mdo ba residents follow

¹ An edited version of <https://bit.ly/3BAbgLo> 21 September 2022.

this.¹ I do not suggest these local understandings, and the terms I use are "standard" for the vast, diverse Tibetosphere.

DMANGS GLU/GLU

The term *dmangs glu* may originate from the Chinese 民歌 *minge* 'folk songs' translated into Tibetan. For example, Sher don et al. (2021) give *dmangs glu* for 民歌 (738). For *dmangs glu*, Huadan Zhaxi et al. (1994) provide folk song, ballad (222); Goldstein et al. (2001) list folk song/ballad; and Bell (1920), Joschke (1881), Pad+ma rdo rje (1989), Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002), and Stag 'bum thar (2016) do not give this term. See Thurston (2012:57), Anton-Luca (2002:179), Craun (2011:79), G.yang skyabs rdo rje (2021:306), Skal bzang rdo rje (2021:13), Sturman (2019:3), Snying mo tshe ring (2017:21), and Li (2008:74) for brief remarks on *dmangs glu*.

Dmangs glu or *glu*² performed in Mdo ba include *bstod glu* 'praise songs', *glu shags* 'humorous songs',³ *bcol glu* 'entrusting/enjoining songs', *skyo glu* 'sad songs', *sbra ston gyi glu* 'new tent celebratory songs', *ne'u ston gyi glu* 'songs for three-year-old sons', and *gya ston gyi glu* 'songs for eighty-year-olds' (Lhun 'grub 2020).

Local traditional songs include *la ye* and *rdung len*, each

¹ To my knowledge, there were no *mgur glu* 'spiritual songs', although such songs were common if declining in popularity, in nearby Tibetan and Tu (Monguor) communities in 2023.

² Before about 2005, locals generally used the term *glu* to refer to what later came to be known as *dmangs glu*. The influence of radio and TV was instrumental in this shift in terms.

³ Sangs rgyas bkra shis et al. (2015) write:

... *glu shags* are generally sung by people fifteen to fifty years old. They are sung antiphonally, and tease, insult, and embarrass those they are sung to. The content might include the appearance of an individual, a family, or a community; clothing; being impoverished; and a poor singing voice. Curses, overt sexual language, and family ancestry are avoided. The lack of sexual content means that *glu shags* are often sung at wedding parties, singing competitions, and other secular gatherings as an entertainment (20).

Sangs rgyas bkra shis is a native of Gcan tsha thang (Jianzhatang) Township, Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Rma lho Prefecture.

with particular melodies, lyrics, and singing circumstances. For example, locals never use a *glu* melody with *la ye* lyrics or a *la ye* melody with *glu* lyrics. *Glu* and *la ye* singers from the local community sing at local weddings, other gatherings such as *chos ston* 'religious meetings' and feasts, and during Lo sar. They also sing *la ye* on the mountains while herding. A singer may employ various *glu* melodies with the same *glu* lyrics and the same for *la ye*.

Some local *la ye* singers play the mandolin while singing *la ye*. Such songs are referred to as *la ye* or *la ye rdung len* owing to their lyrics and melody.

In 2022, most *glu* melodies began with "'o ye...." However, resident Sha bo skyabs (b. 1975) said that when he was a child, local singers began *glu* with *zhang ya re...*, *ldong gi la la...*, *lo yang gi lo...*, and *a spun kho...* New *glu* melodies in 2022 were explained as coming from outside Mdo ba, e.g., "'ba' la yang la mo..., and *ma mgur rgan lo...*"

Glu lyrics consist of metaphors and similes. In most cases, there are three stanzas, with the first two being metaphors and the third being a simile, e.g.:

¹rta 'do ba jag la 'khyer dus su
²sa byang lam gcod pa dpe zhig red
³lcag phra mos mi 'brab khas len byed
⁴khyod rta bdag sems kha bde mo byos

¹mdzo khyung dkar tshong la 'ded dus su
²'dis khal 'khur byed pa dpe zhig red
³rdo gor mos mi rgyag khas len byed
⁴khyod mdzo bdag sems kha bde mo byos

¹sman bu mo gnas la 'gro dus su
²lag las ka slob pa dpe zhig red
³tshig kha log mi rgyag khas len byed
⁴drin ma lo'i sems kha bde mo byos

¹རྟ་འདྲ་བ་ཇག་ལ་འཁྱེར་དུས་སྟུ།

²ས་བྱང་ལམ་གཙོད་པ་དཔེ་ཟིག་རེད།

³ལྷག་པ་མོས་མི་འབྲུག་ལས་ལེན་བྱེད།

⁴ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་བདག་ལྷན་ཁུ་ཁ་བདེ་མོ་བྱས།

¹མཛོ་ཁྱེད་དཀར་ཚོང་ལ་འདྲེད་དུས་སྟུ།

²འདིས་ཁལ་འཁྱར་བྱེད་པ་དཔེ་ཞིག་རེད།

³ང་གི་མོས་མི་ལྷག་ལས་ལེན་བྱེད།

⁴ཁྱེད་མཛོ་བདག་ལྷན་ཁུ་ཁ་བདེ་མོ་བྱས།

¹ལྷན་བྱ་མོ་གནས་ལ་འགྲོ་དུས་སྟུ།

²ལག་ལས་ཀ་སློབ་པ་དཔེ་ཞིག་རེད།

³ཚོག་ཁ་ལོག་མི་ལྷག་ལས་ལེན་བྱེད།

⁴ངྱེས་མཛོ་ལོག་ལྷན་ཁུ་ཁ་བདེ་མོ་བྱས།

¹When riding a horse on a bandit raid

²A long journey is common

³I promise not to whip it at all

⁴You, the horse owner, be assured of this

¹When we drive a *mdzo* on business

²Goods must be packed on it

³I promise not to throw stones at the *mdzo*

⁴You, the *mdzo* owner, be assured of this

¹When a girl marries and moves to the groom's home

²It is common to teach her how to do home chores

³I promise not to scold her

⁴You, the mother, be assured of this¹

This song is a response to an entrusting song by the groom's side to the bride's side at a wedding. The first two stanzas invoke a horse and *mdzo*. The song suggests the bride, which is mentioned in the third stanza - the simile. In contrast, *rdung len* (more below) lyrics are not necessarily metaphors and similes.

While *dmangs glu* and *glu* are often translated as "folk

¹ I have altered certain of the English translations of these lyrics from Lhun 'grub et al. (2020:91-92).

songs," I use *dmangs glu*/*glu*, *la ye*, and *rdung len* in this paper because all three are "folk songs" in the context of *The Oxford English Dictionary* definition: "Folk-song: a song originating from the common people; also, a modern imitation of such a song" (Simpson and Weiner 1989:(5):1,143).

When I asked my maternal grandfather, "When you were a child, did you hear the term '*dmangs glu*'?" he replied:

I didn't hear that term [*dmangs glu*] until around 2000. I first heard it on the radio. It is a new term. *Glu* refers to only one song type sung at weddings today. I remember that *Glu* and *la ye* were the most popular songs in Mdo ba. *Glu* were sung at local weddings, during *Lo sar*, *chos hog* gatherings,¹ and *bzhi ba'i smyung gnas* 'fasting rituals'.²

Locally, *dmangs glu* and *glu* have the same meaning, referring to local traditional songs sung at local weddings and during *Lo sar*.

I asked three other locals born between 1988 and 1992 what locals understood *dmangs glu* and *glu* to mean. They agreed 83s were the same and interchangeable. An example was given of someone asked to sing *glu* or *dmangs glu* at a local gathering with

¹ *Chos thog* is locally held once annually beginning on the first day of the eighth lunar month. At the *chos thog* gathering I attended in 2017, about fifty monks from Dar zHING (Dar zHING bde 'dzoms dga' tshal gling, a Dge lugs monastery founded in 1666 by G.yu rngog bsam gtan rgya mtsho and sponsored by Bde chen bya btang kun dga' chos 'phels (Reb gong pa 'jigs med bsam grub 2013:539-543) located in Mgar rtse (Guashize) Village, Chu khog (Qukuhu) Township, Reb gong City) chanted for ten days on grassland by a large *bsang khri* 'incense burning platform' near Mdo ba Town Center. Before the monks arrived, locals pitched a large tent. Monks chanted, ate, and most slept in the tent or stayed in the homes of relatives living nearby. Local men took turns preparing food in the *ja rus* 'kitchen tent' near the monks' tent and serving the monks. During breaks in chanting, especially at noon and if there was no rain, local elders arranged four or five local singers to offer *glu* praising local *bla ma*, monks, monasteries, and temples. The audience included local monks, women, children, and men. For a short video of the 2019 gathering, see <https://tinyurl.com/4my9hzvu> 5 November 2022).

² See Pad+ma rig 'dzin's (2021) study of a Mdo ba Town fasting gathering <https://bit.ly/3UyGTOb> 22 September 2022.

no one hesitating because they immediately understood the type of song requested.

Several *glu* subtypes that might be sung are determined by lyric content such as *ja glu* 'tea-song', *bstod glu* 'praise song', *rten 'bril gyi glu* 'celebratory song', *bkra shis 'jog pa'i glu* 'goodbye song', and *bcol glu* 'entrusting song'.

From 2012-2022, I attended about fifteen local weddings. Each wedding typically had a gathering at the groom's home and another at the bride's home. When the bride's entourage (generally all men) arrived at the groom's home and were seated, one of the bride's retinues sang *ja glu* asking for a meal while, at the same time, presenting a *kha btags* followed by a *ja dar* 'tea-silk' (generally, a strip of silk about three meters in length and one meter in width).

After the meal, *bstod glu* was sung antiphonally. If the bride's side did not respond in song, a woman from the groom's side flung water in a dipper at them. However, one or more of the bride's side representatives generally sang well and responded to singing from the groom's side.

Wedding attendees are mostly the bride's or groom's relatives and community members, depending on the location of the home gathering,¹ and are pleased to attend. Singers sing *rten 'bril gyi glu* wishing auspiciousness and congratulations.

Toward the end of the gathering, each side may sing only one *bkra shis 'jog pa'i glu*, and at the very end, one of the bride's closest relatives may sing a *bcol glu* 'entrusting song' indicating the bride is now a member of the groom's family and should care for her. The groom's side might respond, assuring they will treat the bride as their daughter.

Although *la ye* were not sung at local weddings, this was not true for all A mdo (Anduo) Tibetan weddings, e.g., Klu thar rgyal (2022:134-135).

Dmangs glu usually consist of three stanzas, each with four verses and each verse consisting of six to nine syllables. The first and second stanzas are metaphors, and the third is a simile. Here

¹ Weddings were held at homes in 2022, mainly because the Mdo ba Town Center had no restaurants large enough to accommodate large wedding parties.

are three examples of what local singers might sing after the first stanza:

ONE (sung by G.yung drung rgyal (b. 1976) after a first stanza)

Glu bar mo bar nas gnang nga zig
 Forgive me for skipping the middle stanza

TWO (sung by 'Brug thar (b. 1988) after a first stanza)

Glu bar mo 'di dang gcig 'dra yin
 The middle stanza is the same as the first one

THREE (sung by Klu sgron skyabs (b. 1968) after a first stanza)

Glu bar mo dbugs kyis mi lcogs gi
 Can't sing the second stanza well.

Dmangs glu begin with 'o ye... Singers do not necessarily stand while singing at local traditional weddings. When performing *dmangs glu*, the singer's left-hand touches their left cheek, the upper body is bent a bit forward if the singer sits cross-legged, and the singer's right hand is placed on the right knee with the elbow raised so that the left arm resembles a bow.

Dmangs glu lyrics reflect local life, beliefs, and worldviews except during a time of chaos beginning in 1966 when many *dmangs glu* lyrics were altered due to the 'Smash the Four Olds' (culture, customs, habits, and ideas) movement. For example, Rta rdo (b. 1964) recalled lyrics praising the Communist Party and leaders and gave this example:

Tang gung kgran dkong gi nyi ma red
 Ma'o kru'u zhi dgong gi nyi ma red

ཏང་གུང་ཁྲུ་འཁོར་གི་ཉི་མ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་
 མའོ་ཀུ་འཁོར་གི་ཉི་མ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་

The Communist Party is the sun in the sky

Chairman Mao is our sun¹
In 2022, such lyrics had vanished.

LA YE

The term "*la ye*" is absent in Joschke (1881), Das (1902), Bell (1920), Pad+ma rdo rje (1989), Huadan Zhaxi et al. (1994), and Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002). Goldstein (2001) suggests *la ye* are songs sung on mountains by herders (1057), and Stag 'bum thar (2016) suggests *la ye* are a mountain song, a type of A mdo song with most verses consisting of seven words with the content about love between men and women (601).²

Romantic relationships are often the subject of *la ye* and are taboo when family members, relatives, *bla ma*, and monks are present. Normally, *la ye* activity does not begin if relatives and elders are in attendance.

Local *la ye* generally have two stanzas with metaphors, e.g., horse, sheep, birds, water, and so on. The second stanza is a simile: "My lover, I like you, want to marry you, want to make love to you."

Love songs are sung on the mountains while grazing animals in the daytime and when night-dating.³ Local *dmangs glu* and *la ye* were the most popular song types in Mdo ba until about 2010.

According to Gcod pa don grub (2019), *la ye* performed in Mtso sngon, Gan lho, and Si khron (Sichuan) include *rtse mgo* 'songs of beginning', *rogs mthun pa'i skor* 'songs of loving', *rogs dran pa'i skor* 'songs of longing', *rogs 'gal ba'i skor* 'break up songs', *rogs rtsod pa'i skor* 'quarreling songs', and *bde mo 'jog pa'i skor*

¹ See also Anton-Luca (2002:117) for an example of altered lyrics during this period:

Mo khyod ni gung chin thon yon You are a member of the Young Communist League,
Pho nga ni gung khran tang yon And I am a member of the Communist Party,

Zhe snang ba spyi tshogs ring lugs red This feeling we share is for Socialism.

² For more on these three terms, see Appendix: Terms.

³ Night-dating is a traditional way to meet current or potential lovers. Men typically visit unmarried women at night hoping to have sex.

'farewell songs'.

RDUNG LEN

Rdung len is not listed by Joschke (1881), Das (1902), Bell (1920), Pad+ma rdo rje (1989), Huadan Zhaxi et al. (1994), Goldstein (2001), Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002), and Stag 'bum thar (2016).

Rdung len refers to songs with accompaniment from the Tibetan lute or mandolin (Thurston 2019, Lama Jabb 2011), literally meaning playing and singing (Collinge 2020, Craun 2011, Morcom 2011). The term *rdung len* locally also refers to "...songs in A mdo Tibetan dialect accompanied by mandolin and increasingly nowadays with synthesized music and a beat" (Morcom 2017:11). The Tibetan lute did not become popular among A mdo Tibetans until Dpal mgon's (b. 1948) first performance on the Mtsho sngon Tibetan Broadcast Station in 1979 (Craun 2011).¹ Dpal mgon and his student, Gdu b+he² (1968-2016; aka Dubey, Doobey, Dubhe), were the well-known *rdung len* song performers Mdo ba people first became aware of. For example, as a child, my family listened to Dpal mgon's *A khu pad ma*³ and *Snying rje na rje rgyu gan na 'dug* on my family's radio around supper time at home. My hands unconsciously moved in imitation of a *rdung len* performer when I listened to his performance, especially his *A khu pad ma*.

Today, piano, drum set, guitar, and other instruments may

¹ Dpal mgon (b. 1949) from Rma chu (Maqu) County, Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kan su'u Province graduated from the Department of Medicine, Northwest University for Nationalities in 1970. See <https://bit.ly/3cYRuky> 9 September 2022 for an example of one of his songs.

² Gdu b+he from Rma chu County was considered one of the most accomplished mandolin performers and singers. See (1-20) <https://bit.ly/3U4XLvL> (21-40) <https://bit.ly/3S6ufnc>, (41-60) <https://bit.ly/3U7CvW1>, (61-80) <https://bit.ly/3Ud9M2f>, and (81-100) <https://bit.ly/3LcyDyW> for examples of his performances 21 June 2022.

³ See the video version <https://bit.ly/3xnzkQi> 14 September 2022 of Dbal mgon's first well-known *rdung len* performance from the Mtsho sngon Tibetan Broadcast Station in 1979.

accompany *rdung len* and modern songs.¹ For instance, the Seventh A mdo *rdung len* competition winner in 2020, Skal bzang bkra shis,² was accompanied by the mandolin, guitar, cajon, flute, and two Tibetan lutes.

A difference between local *dmangs glu*, *la ye*, and *rdung len* is that *rdung len* is written by one or two people and performed by another person, e.g., the lyrics of *Mthun sgril gyi rang sgra* 'Song of Unity' were composed by Stag lha rgyal, the melody by Gdu b+he, and Sher bstan³ sang it. The content of *rdung len* lyrics includes praise of landscape and venerable people (*bla ma*, monks, and local elders). It expresses such emotions as missing family members and expressing happiness at a gathering of friends. In contrast, local *dmangs glu* are not composed by specific people but are orally transmitted from generation to generation with little change in lyrics, melodies, and performance characteristics.

By 2000, almost every local family had a radio that provided initial contact with *rdung len* songs that local youth soon favored. At this time, locals bought radio-tape players and tapes and listened to and imitated singers performing *rdung len*, such as Gdu b+he and Nam mkha'.⁴

After 2004, the township town had electricity, and locals began watching TV programs and pirated cheap VCDs with low-quality sound and images featuring *rdung len* and modern songs. Youth enjoyed performances by the G·yu 'brug Band,⁵ the Ri

¹ "Modern songs" as used here refers to Western song style and singing with electronic musical instruments, accordion, piano, harmonica, synthesizer, trombone, saxophone, electric guitar, and drums.

² See <https://bit.ly/3LzNSSK> 1 October 2022.

³ Sher bstan (b. 1982) is a well-known *rdung len* and modern song singer, from Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. See <https://bit.ly/3BduWoN> 6 December 2022 for one of his performances.

⁴ Nam mkha' (b. 1973), a well-known *rdung len* singer, is from Thun te (Tongde) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. For an example of one of his songs, see <https://bit.ly/3DmovPi> 21 June 2022).

⁵ The G.yu 'brug Band, established in 2005, had four members from Rma chu County. See <https://bit.ly/3qCSjCF> 21 June 2022 for one of their performances.

spyang Band,¹ and Bde skyid tshe ring,² indicating diminishing interest in local traditional songs. They found modern instruments and music videos (MV) more attractive. Furthermore, local youths attended schools that separated them from frequent interaction with and exposure to local song culture. This rapidly declining interest in local traditional songs among youth was common in other Rma lho areas. For example, Phun tshogs dbang rgyal and Qi (2017) comment about Rma lho (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County:

During the New Year of 2016, I heard not one dmangs glu nor a single rdung len. Furthermore, locals' enthusiasm for singing parties had been replaced by an interest in card parties and listening and posting rdung len on such smartphone apps as Skad 'phrin (WeChat, Weixin), Changba, and PaPa (72-121).

LOCAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

This section describes the local flute, mandolin, and Tibetan lute in Mdo ba.

The local flute was rarely played in 2022, while the mandolin and Tibetan lute were popular in the early fifteen years of the twenty-first century but much less so today. I vividly recall a mandolin player, Stag lha tshe ring (b. 1986), who I herded with in the summer pasture in 2003. He was skilled at the mandolin, which he played to herders (including me) who circled him when we herded yaks, sheep, and horses on the mountains. He sang various songs while playing, holding our attention.

When Sha bo don 'grub (b. 1990), one of my paternal cousins, was fourteen, his father asked him if he wanted a bicycle or a mandolin. He chose a mandolin and soon became a good player.

¹ The Ri spyang Band, established in 2007, was the first pop metal band in Tibetan areas of China with members from Mtsho lho and Rma lho Tibetan autonomous prefectures. See <https://bit.ly/3dlzyjY> 21 June 2022 for one of their performances.

² Bde skyid tshe ring (b. 1984) was a well-known rap singer from Chudmar leb (Qumalai) County, Yul shul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon. See <https://bit.ly/3QBrN8j> 21 June 2022 for one of his performances.

I often went to his home to listen to him play the mandolin and sing.

FLUTE

My maternal grandfather told me he saw a musical instrument (a local flute) for the first time in 1985. It belonged to his friend, Khyu lu (1943-2011), who bought it in Bla brang for two *yuan*. Khyu lu didn't sing, but he enjoyed playing a flute about sixty centimeters long and about one and a half centimeters in diameter with seven holes. There were few flutes at that time in the Mdo ba area.

Bsod nams bkra shis (1938-2018) described the *bod gling* 'Tibetan flute' and his experience in Mdo ba with the Tibetan flute and commented on the *rgya gling* 'Chinese flute' (Lhun 'grub et al. 2020:74-75). He also mentioned the *rkang gling* 'leg-flute' and *ding ru'i gling bu* 'vulture wing bone flute'.¹ I never saw a vulture wing bone flute and rarely saw Tibetan and Chinese flutes, indicative of their limited use in Mdo ba in 2022.

Tshe dpa' (b. 1973) described local *dmangs glu* singers playing the flute for about thirty seconds before they sang the first stanza, blowing it after the first stanza, and again after the second stanza if there were three stanzas.

Glu gar rgyal² (b. 1961), a well-known A mdo *dmangs glu* singer, sang Bod kha ba can gyi pha khu rnams 'Tibetan respectful elders' on Bod kyī dmangs glu 'gran sdur skabs gnyis pa'i bya dga'i gzengs skyes stsol ba'i dgong tshogs 'the award party of the Second Tibetan *Dmangs glu* Competition'.³ He blew the flute for twenty-five seconds before singing the first stanza, then again for twenty-four seconds before the second stanza, and once more for twenty-two seconds before he sang the third stanza.

The flute was the local singers' instrument. Some liked to

¹ MaMing et al. (2020:20-30) described the vulture wing bone flute as relatively complex with five, six, and seven scales.

² Glu gar rgyal was interviewed by Rang grol rdo rje from Kha b'i zhabz rje 'footprint in the snow' channel of the A mdo TV Station <https://bit.ly/3CIyUHv> 5 October 2022.

³ Glu gar rgyal's performance starts from 1'40" at <https://bit.ly/3Efblag> 5 October 2022).

play it but did not sing.

The only time I saw a local play a flute was in about 2005 when I accompanied one of my uncles to his friend's home. Uncle's friend, in his mid-thirties, discovered his old flute covered by dust in a wooden box outside his house, cleaned it, and demonstrated how to play it. He commented that he had played it very well in his twenties and added he played the flute before singing and again after singing the first *dmang glu* stanza.

Locals sing *dmangs glu* without instrumental accompaniment in most cases. The flute was the only musical instrument that occasionally accompanied local *dmangs glu*. For instance, the famous A mdo *dmangs glu* singer Gu ru's famous *dmangs glu Sga'i snga ri 'di la chags shig 'jog 'So Good...as the Pommel of this Saddle'*¹ is accompanied only by a flute.

Today, some younger singers prefer electronic musical instruments to accompany their singing, e.g., Chos skyong skyabs, the grand champion of the Second A mdo *dmangs glu* Competition in 2019,² and local *dmangs glu* singer, Tshe dpal skybas.³

MANDOLINS AND TIBETAN LUTES

Musical instruments have a very short local history. According to locals, the flute was the first musical instrument in Mdo ba in 1985. Mandolins and Tibetan lutes appeared around 2000. Only the mandolin and Tibetan lute were popular in Mdo ba in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

The Tibetan lute was introduced in the local region from Mnga' ris (Ngari) in the eighteenth century. The second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa⁴ brought three musical instruments (Tibetan

¹ See <https://bit.ly/3EkaJAb> 5 October 2022.

² See <https://bit.ly/3Uix86v> 24 September 2022.

³ See <https://bit.ly/3UbXEOO> 24 September 2022.

⁴ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1648-1721) was the first of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa incarnation lineage. For more, see <https://bit.ly/3Dq3bLU> 14 September 2022.

lute, 'brong rwa'i sgra snyan 'wild-yak horn fiddle',¹ and flute)² when he returned from Lhasa to Bla brang Monastery³ after completing studies in Dbus gtsang in 1702 (Yinzhu Sangmao 2019). The mandolin was also introduced to the A mdo area around about 1980 (Craun 2011). Local Mdo ba *rdung len* singer Sha bo bkra shis (b. 1977) said he bought a mandolin in 1999 and, before that, he hadn't seen a mandolin in Mdo ba. In 2005, he bought a Tibetan lute from a musical instrument store in Bla brang for 1,500 *yuan* and said he was the first in Mdo ba to buy a Tibetan lute.

Today, local *rdung len* singers use mandolins, Tibetan lutes, and other modern music and electronic instruments. For instance, a well-known local singer, 'Bum mtsho skyid (b. 1990), used a mandolin and drum set in her famous song, *Gnas 'gro bu mo*,⁴ in 2020.

INVESTIGATION

In 2022, Chinese, English, and Tibetan modern music were more popular than local traditional songs in Mdo ba. To further study this declining interest, I asked some locals in Mdo ba and my students

¹ 'Brong rwa'i sgra snyan is a Tibetan traditional music instrument ('brong rwa 'wild yak horn', sgra snyan 'pleasant sound' made from wild yak horn, sheep skin, horsetail string, and wood). Find an audio and short video featuring 'brong rwa'i sgra snyan at <https://bit.ly/3xmBWht> 14 September 2022.

² See <https://bit.ly/3RKniJ1> 14 September 2022 for a performance featuring Ngari sgra snyan, 'brong rwa'i sgra snyan, and gling bu played together during the Mtsho sngon Radio and Television Station Tibetan Broadcasting 60th Anniversary Celebration Party in 2012. Instrument players were Mkhyen 'grub (flute), Tshe ring dbang 'dus ('brong rwa'i sgra snyan), Dga' ldan (mnga' ris sgra snyan), Rdo red (mnga' ris sgra snyan), and Pad ma bsam 'grub ('brong rwa'i sgra snyan).

³ Bla brang Monastery (Labrang Monastery, Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, Dge ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas bkra shis gyas su 'khyil ba'i gling) located in Bsang chu County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kan su'u Province, was founded by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo tje ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648-1721) in 1709 (Dbal mang paN Di ta 1987).

⁴ See <https://bit.ly/3DugQl4> 24 September 2022.

in Sder nang:¹ "What kind of songs do you enjoy listening to? Why?"

When I was an English teacher at Sder nang Primary School in June 2022, I planned to ask some locals in person about local *dmangs glu*. Unfortunately, circumstances changed, so I also used WeChat to interview two groups from Mdo ba. Four people born between 1980-1961 were in the first group, and five (I met three in person) born between 1992-2002 were in the second group. All were male.

The first group's common reply was that they appreciated *dmangs glu* because they had grown up with such songs and felt good when they heard them, especially when the performer had a good voice. *Dmangs glu* invoked nostalgia for gatherings and weddings, and two added that they could not understand Tibetan modern song lyrics.

Group Two (I sent a WeChat audio message to two who replied with audio messages) had very different responses. One said he liked both *dmangs glu* and modern songs, each with its own characteristics, so it was hard to say which he preferred. The other four said they often listened to modern songs rather than local traditional *dmangs glu* because modern songs better captured their thoughts, and the lyrics were about modern life.

In addition, I surveyed my students at the school. As mentioned, I was teaching English. My students were from the local pastoral area in grades four, five, and six. I took the opportunity to ask them in class, "Khyod rang dmangs glu la dga' 'am deng rabs glu dbyangs la dga' rgyu mtshan ci 'Do you prefer *dmangs glu* (DG) or modern songs (MS)? Why?'"

Forty-eight students were in Grade Four (fifteen boys and thirty-three girls). The oldest was thirteen, and the youngest was ten. Of the forty-eight, only two indicated they preferred *dmangs glu* to modern songs.

Of the fifty students in Grade Five (sixteen boys and thirty-four girls; the youngest was ten and the oldest was fifteen), none

¹ Sder nang Township, Dar lag County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon.

preferred *dmangs glu*, while of the thirty-five students in Grade Six (eleven boys and twenty-four girls; the oldest was twenty and the youngest was twelve), four liked *dmangs glu*, while the others preferred modern songs.

Primary Grades 2-6 song preferences.

Grade	Total # Students	Oldest/ Youngest	(Boys)/ (Girls)	Like DG/MS
4	48	14-10	15 boys, 33 girls	2 DG/46 MS
5	50	15-10	16 boys, 34 girls	0 DG/50 MS
6	35	20-12	11 boys, 24 girls	4 DG/31MS

I randomly chose five students from each grade (in class) and asked them to explain their choice. Students who chose modern songs typically said *dmangs glu* lyrics were challenging to understand because of the metaphors. They added they didn't know how to appreciate local *dmangs glu* with its low pitch and few lyrics that last for several long seconds. In contrast, they said, modern songs had lyrics much easier to understand, the lyrics were "close to our world," and the musical instruments and MVs were more attractive.

The six students who said they preferred local *dmangs glu* did not provide specific reasons.

SGROL MA SKYABS

LIFE

On 5-27 February and 7 March 2022, I interviewed Sgrol ma skyabs about his life and singing experiences. Sgrol ma skyabs (b 1978), a herdsman, grew up with livestock, and in 2022, he continues to herd yaks and sheep throughout the year. He was well-known locally as a Tibetan traditional *dmangs glu* singer and was particularly appreciated for his antiphonal singing at weddings. In 2022 he sang *dmangs glu* traditional songs at *bag ston* 'local weddings', *khang ston* 'new house celebrations', and *gya ston* 'eighty-year-old celebrations'. His life experiences and his family

background vividly characterize a traditional local family.

I describe Sgrol ma skyabs' family background, including his parents, younger brother, and younger sister; life experiences, including his childhood, schooling, herding life, his family responsibilities, worries about his ill father and his two unschooled sons, and his experiences of singing local *dmangs glu*. I also give four of Sgrol ma skyabs' songs as performed; a literary, poetic text in Tibetan script and Wylie; and an English translation.

During my interviews with Sgrol ma skyabs at his winter pasture home and via WeChat, I recorded our conversations on my phone and laptop, took notes, listened again, and translated and edited the following account:

My name is Sgrol ma skyabs. I am from the Ra rgan 'Tsho ba 'Clan',¹ Yo lag Village, Mdo ba Town. There are sixty-four households and about 250 residents in our brigade. It is a herding area where we herd sheep, yaks, and horses.

My parents have two sons and a daughter. My sister, Mkha' 'gro mtsho (b. 1984), never attended school. She married a man from our clan when she was about eighteen. They divorced about six months later. When she was about twenty, she married again and moved to her husband's home in the Ldong nges Clan, where she lives today. She has a son and a daughter. Both attend school.

My younger brother, Rdo rje rab brtan (b. 1986), is an illiterate herdsman who attended the local primary school for about ten days, left, and never returned. We lived with our parents until he married. My father then divided us into two families.

My mother, Mtsho mo (b. 1961), lives with Rdo rje rab brtan, his wife Lha mo (b. 1989), and their children. One child attends the local primary school, a second son born in 2019 died three months after birth, and a third son was born in 2021.

I live with my father, my wife (Sgrol ma, b. 1982), and our three children.

¹ Sgrol ma skyabs used the term *'tsho ba 'clan'*. Local officials use *ru khag* and *dui* 'brigade' in Tibetan and Chinese, respectively. Both terms appear on Mdo ba residents' ID cards. Yo lag Village is home to the Ra rgan, Bon po, Bla brang ma, 'Ja' mo, Rin kho, Blon chen, and Dpon skor clans. In Chinese, these terms are referred to as Yi ('One'), Er ('Two'), San ('Three'), Si ('Four'), Wu ('Five'), Liu ('Six'), and Qi ('Seven') brigades, respectively.

My father is an illiterate good herder. He cared for our livestock until I could herd well. He is also a Tibetan chess expert. Unfortunately, he has been seriously ill since 2020. In about 2011, a small tumor appeared on the roof of his mouth. He ignored it until it was very painful. The doctors said it was too late to treat when we went to the Number One Hospital (Di yi renming yiyuan) in Zi ling (Xining) City in 2020. A local bla ma suggested we go to the Kan su'u (Gansu) Provincial Tumor Hospital, where Father was hospitalized for several months, but he didn't improve. Today, he frequently takes painkillers and spends most of his time in bed. Mother tends him in the Mdo ba Town Center in Rdo rje rab brtan's house. I cannot always be with him because I must care for our livestock in the winter and summer pastures. Father's illness brings a lot of pressure and makes me unhappy.

My illiterate wife never attended school. We married in 1999 and now have two sons and a daughter. My wife is a hard worker and spends nearly all her time at home. She cooks for our family, tethers yaks in the evening, collects yak dung, and milks our yaks every morning.

Sangs rgyas (b. 2001) is my oldest son. When he was a child, there was a small hump on his right shoulder. Today, his scoliosis is more severe. He graduated from junior high school last year, but after failing the senior high school entrance examination, he stopped attending. I constantly worry about his future. He can't work very well, and it will be difficult for him to find a partner. I have suggested he become a monk, which he is willing to do. Unfortunately, Mdo sngags dar rgyas gling¹ and Reb gong dar zhing bde 'dzoms dga' tshal gling² didn't accept him because of his scoliosis. He stays at home with nothing to do. I worry about this.

Tshe ring (b. 2007), my second son, graduated from the local primary school last year, attended junior high school in Thun rin City for a semester, and then stopped schooling. He is often in the Town Center with his friends and doesn't come to our home in the herding area. I worry about his future. I have no idea how he will make a better life for himself. He hated school and also doesn't like herding

¹ Founded by Dge 'dun rgya mtsho in 1956, Mdo sngags dar rgyas gling is southwest of the Mdo ba Town Center. Skal bzang bstan 'dzin (A khu sman tog) and Brtson 'grus rgya mtso reopened the monastery after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976; Reb gong pa 'jigs med bsam grub 2013:528-533).

² Dar zhing bde 'dzoms dga' tshal gling Monastery is in Mgar rtse (Guashize) Village, Chu khog (Qukuhu) Township, Reb gong City. It was founded by G.yu rngog bsam gtan rgya mtsho and sponsored by Bde chen bya btang kun dga' chos 'phels in 1666 (Reb gong pa 'jigs med bsam grub 2013:539-543).

our livestock.

My daughter, Lha mo (b. 2003), is a senior high school student. She does well in study, and I will support her as much as possible. She doesn't like herding livestock, but she is a good student, and I hope she has a bright future with a good job. I'm happy about that.

I am now the head of our family. Father gave me his position a few years after I married. He wasn't much concerned about our family when I was old enough to take care of our family. He walked to town to play chess with his friends almost daily until we got a house in the Mdo ba Town Center.

Our life depends on herding yaks and sheep. Today, I have 173 sheep and sixty-three yaks. As I mentioned, there are six people in my family. I have three *myi skal*¹ of winter pasture and four *myi skal* in the summer pasture. My children weren't born when our land was divided, so they were not assigned grassland in winter and summer pastures, except for my oldest son, who has a *myi skal* in the summer grassland.

I'll now tell you about my life experiences and how I learned traditional songs. I was responsible as a child for helping Father care for our sheep. In about 1989, when I was eleven years old, local government officers and local teachers collected students from each village by lottery to attend school. Nobody wanted to send their children to school at that time. Everybody was hoping that they wouldn't be selected by lottery.

The lottery selected me in 1989. My family would have to pay 400 RMB if I did not attend school, so I attended that year. Teacher Lcags byams, a farmer from somewhere in Reb gong, was my headteacher. Tibetan and math were our only subjects. I initially took every class seriously because I was afraid of the

¹ The *myi skal* (*myi* 'person', *skal* 'sharing') is a variable local grassland measure. Local leaders divided grassland among families in 1994. Age and gender were treated the same during division. Each person received one *myi skal* of winter pasture, so a family of five received five *myi skal* of winter pasture. In this circumstance, one *myi skal* was about 100 *mu*/6.67 hectares/247.10 acres (this information is from a noticeboard in the Chinese language in the government offices courtyard in the Town Center in 2020). Meanwhile, forty percent of grassland remained for summer pasture. Each person was assigned one *myi skal*. In this case, *myi skal* size depended on summer grassland quality. What was considered good grassland was divided into smaller *myi skal* units while poor quality *myi skal* grazing units (e.g., rocky mountains and forests) were larger.

teachers. I studied well, but later I was very homesick and often escaped [the boarding] school.

When I was in Grade Three, my study results were no longer very good because I had missed many classes and wasn't focusing on studying. I didn't want to stay in school anymore. Today, I fully regret that choice. Whenever Lcags byams came to my home and asked me to return to school, I would, but I soon escaped again. I would be a teacher now if I had stayed in school. I vividly remember Lcags byams coming to my home and promising my family and me that he would help me become a local teacher if I continued schooling and graduated from the local primary school. Unfortunately, I stopped schooling, and my family paid the 400 RMB fine.

I didn't know how to consider my future at that time. Most of us didn't understand the value of schooling. I could have been a good model for my children today and help with their studies if I had been a teacher. Instead, I cannot help my children very much in their studies. My sons have stopped schooling. My younger son particularly doesn't like school and studying. Now I suppose I am not good enough to educate them well, and I also don't know how to educate them well.

As I mentioned, I grew up in a herding area on the Plateau, and my home area is relatively underdeveloped. When I was a child, there was no TV, no radio, and very few books besides holy books that we didn't open. Listening to folktales and playing with herdmates was much of my childhood. My brother and sister took turns telling folktales almost every night after dinner. I could retell about thirty folktales completely and with a lot of emotion when I was a child. But now I've almost forgotten them all. I was also interested in local dmangs glu when I was about fifteen. My mother has a good voice and was asked to sing local traditional dmangs glu when she attended local gatherings and during special times such as Lo sar. Some suggested I had inherited my mother's good voice, so relatives and locals often asked me to sing. This gave me the idea that I had a good voice like my mother.

As locals continued encouraging me to sing local dmangs glu, I began to pay attention to local singers and secretly practiced singing by myself after hearing local singers. Afterward, I rarely missed attending local gatherings and weddings because I wanted to hear the singing. Still, being a good singer requires more than having a good voice and knowing many songs. It is important to sing appropriate songs at the right time, and the manner of singing is also important.

Your body position, body movement, and gestures are critical to being a great public singer because they show sophistication. Local singers sang in two

places when I was a child. The most popular was at local weddings where local singers sang when a bride or groom arrived at the home of their groom or bride. On these occasions, the singers should sit cross-legged with their upper body bent a bit forward while slightly inclined to their right with the right elbow against the right knee and the right hand against their right cheek. The left hand is placed on the left knee, and the elbow is raised so the left arm resembles a bow. These positions can be reversed depending on the singer's choice.

Other local gatherings included monastery feasts, the local Bzhi ba'i smyung gnas 'Fasting of the Fourth Month' gathering, and horse races. Singers sang while standing and usually held a kha btags at such gatherings. Sometimes the singer held the kha btags in his right hand with his left hand against his left cheek while slowly and rhythmically walking step by step. I carefully observed these body positions and movements and often practiced when I was herding sheep in the mountains.

I also listened to many local singers, often memorized what I considered good lyrics, and practiced the songs myself when I was in the mountains. I also changed some of the lyrics to improve them.

I also considered responses while singing antiphonally. There are many local songs such as glu shags 'humorous songs'.¹ Dri glu ask questions, challenging the opponent, who is considered the loser if they cannot reply. Bstod glu are sung at weddings, new house parties, and during Lo sar. Ja glu and bcol glu are only sung at weddings. Ja glu asks for a meal when the bride's or groom's entourage arrives at the home where the wedding is held. Bcol glu tells the bride's or groom's side to kindly treat the new family member [groom or bride].

Song melodies must be learned well. Not doing so is to run the risk of mixing a love song melody with a non-love song melody, which is very shameful because local romantic relationships are forbidden in public places where relatives gather. I use *Ldong la re* and *lo yang lo*² most frequently because they suit my voice and are easy to sing.

After practicing alone in the mountains hundreds of times, I thought I could sing well. I carefully listened to the songs when I attended weddings and

¹ Lhun 'grub et al. (2020:49) provide "...songs that featured joking and teasing content to entertain and make everyone laugh" and use "*glu shags*." Locals use *shags glu* and *glu shags* interchangeably.

² *Ldong la re* and *lo yang lo* were local *dmangs glu* melodies common in my home community. *Ldong la re* were vocally demanding. *Lo yang lo* were much easier to sing with a faster rhythm than *ldong la re*.

mentally replied to them, hoping someone would ask me to sing. Unfortunately, I didn't hear such encouragement for several years.

I sang a traditional local song at a [Mdo sngags dar rgyas gling] Monastery celebration when I was seventeen. Locals believed I could sing local songs well because my mother had a good voice, and a local elder encouraged me to sing. I felt pleasure and fear at that moment. I was happy because I dreamed of singing at such a gathering, and I was afraid because I had never sung in public.

There were about 200 people at that celebration. I had to stand when someone gave me a kha btags. My legs trembled like a flag in the wind. I went to the middle of the gathering and assumed a posture I had practiced on the mountain. My left hand touched my left cheek, and my right hand held a kha btags that I slowly raised and lowered. I couldn't see the people there or hear my voice because I was so nervous. I can't remember the melody I used then, but I remember the lyrics.

SONGS

SONG ONE

Sgrol ma skyabs vividly remembers the song below. The lyrics are from his first public performance when he was seventeen. This song is particularly suitable for religious ceremonies or gatherings and very suitable when praising certain areas. The second stanza mentions a Reb gong *bla ma* and a Reb gong location and is only sung in the Reb gong area. Also, the first stanza mentions a certain place. The first stanza is usually a metaphor.

Song Text as Performed

¹ser gyi le nyi rtse brgyab 'dra bo
²chags zhog ra dbus gtsang dog gis zhing red
³gan jo ma ga brgyad gi gdan sa red la
⁴'di ban ser mos grub mtha' rtsod sa red gras
⁵zhaw hud la phyag gsum gan na tsha wo
⁶ga ha na mgon skyabs mdzad ni med

glu bar mo bar nas gnang nga byin ko

¹ser gyi le mar bsku khyil 'dra bo
²chags zhog ra reb gong gser mo ljongs red
³gan shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gdan sa red gras
⁴gsum ma Ni yig drug gsung sa red gras
⁵'u chos zhaw hud la phyag gsum ga na tsha wo
⁶ga han na mgon skyabs mdzad ni med go

ngas glu shes ni min ra rtem 'brel red gras

¹སེར་གྱི་ལེ་ཉི་མེ་བརྒྱུ་འདྲ་བོ།
²ཆགས་ཞོག་ར་དབུས་གཙང་དོག་གིས་ཞིང་རེད།
³གན་རྩོ་མ་ག་བརྒྱད་གི་གདན་ས་རེད་ལ།
⁴འདི་བན་སེར་མོས་བྲུབ་མཐའ་ཚོད་ས་རེད་གས།
⁵ཞུ་དུང་ལ་བྱག་གསུམ་གན་ན་ཚ་མོ།
⁶ག་ཏ་ན་མགོན་སྐྱབས་མཛད་ནི་མེད།
 སྤྱ་བར་མོ་བར་ནས་གནང་ང་བྱིན་ཀོ
¹སེར་གྱི་ལེ་མར་བསྐྱུ་ཁྱིལ་འདྲ་བོ།
²ཆགས་ཞོག་ར་རེབ་གོང་གསེར་མོ་ལྗངས་རེད།
³གན་གར་སྐལ་ལྷན་བྱ་མཚའི་གདན་ས་རེད་གས།
⁴གསུམ་མ་ཉི་ཡིག་བྲུག་གསུང་ས་རེད་གས།
⁵འུ་ཚོས་ཞུ་དུང་ལ་བྱག་གསུམ་གན་ན་ཚ་མོ།
⁶ག་ཏ་ན་ན་མགོན་སྐྱབས་མཛད་ནི་མེད་གོ།
 ངས་སྤྱ་ཤེས་ནི་མེན་ར་ཉེས་འབྲེལ་རེད་གས།

Literary Poetic Text

¹ser lam me nyi rtse brgyabs 'dra bo
²chags bzhag na dbus gtsang dag pa'i zhing
³jo ma ga brgyad kyi gdan sa red
⁴ban ser mo'i grub mtha' rtsod sa red
⁵zhaw phud nas phyag gsum gan na 'tshal
⁶gan yan gi mgon skyabs mdzad ni med

glu bar mo bar nas gnang ba byin

¹ser gyi le mar khu 'khyil 'dra bo
²chags bzhag na reb gong gser mo ljongs
³shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gdan sa red
⁴gsung ma Ni yig drug gsung sa red
⁵zhaw phud la phyag gsum gan na 'tshal
⁶gan phan gi mgon skyabs gnang ni med

glu shes mi min 'dra rten 'brel red

¹སེར་ལམ་མེ་ཉི་མེ་བརྒྱབས་འདྲ་བོ།
²ཆགས་བཞག་ན་དབུས་གཙང་དག་པའི་ཞིང་།
³ཤ་ས་ག་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་གདན་ས་རེད།
⁴བན་སེར་མོས་བྱུང་མཐའ་ཚུད་ས་རེད།
⁵ཞུ་ཕུད་ནས་བྱག་གསུམ་གན་ན་འཚལ།
⁶གན་ཡན་གི་མགོན་སྐབས་མཛད་ནི་མེད།
 སྐུ་བར་མོ་བར་ནས་གནང་བ་བྱིན།

¹སེར་གྱི་ལེ་མར་ཁུ་འབྱུང་འདྲ་བོ།
²ཆགས་བཞག་ན་རེབ་གོང་གསེར་མོ་ཚུངས།
³ཤར་སྐལ་ཐུན་བྱ་མཚའི་གདན་ས་རེད།
⁴གསུང་མ་ཉེ་ཡིག་དྲུག་གསུང་ས་རེད།
⁵ཞུ་ཕུད་ལ་བྱག་གསུམ་གན་ན་འཚལ།
⁶གན་ཡན་གི་མགོན་སྐབས་གནང་ནི་མེད།

སྐུ་ཤེས་ནི་མེན་འདྲ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་རེད།

Translation

¹As gold as dawn's glow
²Tibet's Dbus gtsang
³The site of the eight holiest Buddha images
⁴Where sacred monks debate philosophical questions
⁵Remove your hat and pay homage
⁶There is no better blessing

Forgive me for skipping the middle stanza

¹As gold as melted butter

²Is the region of Reb gong

³The birthplace of His Holiness, Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho¹

⁴Where sacred *ma Ni* are chanted

⁵Remove your hat and pay homage

⁶There is no better blessing

I don't sing to impress but for auspiciousness.

SONG TWO

This song is performed at weddings from the groom's side to the bride's side when the singing begins at the wedding.

Song Text as Performed

'o ye ye ye ya re la mo ngas glu zig len 'go 'o

¹khyod a zhang gzo rma bya yang sngon mo re la

²nga gnyen tshang sang chu 'brug ljang khya re la

³'u kha gnyis ga rma 'brug yang kha sprod re la

⁴dis rtags rte 'brel gi dang ngo yang 'di nas 'grig ga gzas

¹'o khyod a zhang tshang seng ge yang dkar mo re la

²nga gnyen tshang sang rgya stag yang dmar ro re la

³'u kha nyis ka stag seng yang kha sprod re la

⁴rtags rte 'brel gi nyis ba yang 'di nas 'grig ga gzas

¹'e khyod a zhang tshang 'do rigs yang rta bo re la

²'o snyan tshang sang rlung nag yang 'tshub ma re la

³'u kha nyis ka rlung rta yang sde bzhi re la

⁴rtags rte 'brel gyi gsum pa yang 'di nas 'grig ga

ngas glu shes no gzo min 'dra dga' ni yin

¹ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1607-1677) was the first of the Rong bo grub chen or Shar skal ldan rgyal mtsho incarnation lineage. His reincarnations were the head *bla ma* of Reb gong Monastery (for more, see <https://bit.ly/3QFndFp> 13 August 2022).

²ང་ག་ཉེན་ཚང་སང་ཚུ་འབྲུག་ལྗང་བྱ་རེ་ལ།

³བྱ་ཁ་གཉིས་ག་མ་འབྲུག་ཡང་ཁ་སྒྲིང་རེ་ལ།

4འདིས་རྟགས་རྟེ་འབྲེལ་གི་དང་ངོ་ཡང་འདི་ནས་འགྲིག་ག་གཟས།

¹འོ་སྤྱད་ཨ་ཞང་ཆང་སང་གེ་ཡང་དཀར་མོ་རེ་ལ།

²ང་གཉིས་ཆང་སང་གྱུ་སྟག་ཡང་དམར་རོ་རེ་ལ།

3 ལྷ་ཁ་ཉིས་ཀ་སྟག་སེང་ཡང་ཁ་སྟོང་རེ་ལ།

⁴རྟགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གི་ཉིས་བ་ཡང་འདི་ནས་འབྲིག་ག་གཟས།

¹འེ་བྱོད་ཨ་ཞང་ཆང་འདོ་རིགས་ཡང་རྟ་བོ་རེ་ལ།

²འོ་སྟོན་ཚང་སང་རྒྱང་ནག་ཡང་འཁྱུང་མ་རེ་ལ།

3 ལྟ་ཁ་ཉིས་ཀ་རྒྱང་རྟ་ཡང་སྡེ་བཞི་རེ་ལ།

⁴རྟགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་གསུམ་པ་ཡང་འདི་ནས་འབྲིག་ག།

ངས་སྤྱི་ཤེས་ལྷོ་གཞོ་མེན་འདྲ་དགའ་ཅི་ཡིན།

¹khyod a zhang rma bya sngon mo red

²nga gnyen tshang chu 'brug ljang khra red

3'u kha gnyis rma 'brug kha sprod red

⁴rtags rten 'brel gyi dang po 'di nas 'grig

¹khyod a zhang seng ge dkar mo red

²nga gnyen tshang rgya stag dmar po red

3'u kha gnyis stag seng kha sprod red

⁴rtags rten 'brel gyi gnyis pa 'di nas 'grig

¹khyod a zhang 'do rigs rta pho red

²nga gnyen tshang rlung nag 'tshub ma red

3'u kha gnyis rlung rta sde bzhi red

⁴rtags rten 'brel gyi gsum pa 'di nas 'grig

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¹ཁྱད་ཨ་ཁང་མ་བྱ་ཐོན་མོ་རེད།

²ང་གཉེན་ཚང་ཆུ་འབྲུག་ལྗང་ལྷ་རེད།

³འུ་ལ་གཉིས་མ་འབྲུག་ལ་ཐོན་རེད།

⁴རྟགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་དང་པོ་འདི་ནས་འགྲིག།

¹ཁྱད་ཨ་ཁང་མེད་གེ་དཀར་མོ་རེད།

²ང་གཉེན་ཚང་ཆུ་ལྷག་དམར་པོ་རེད།

³འུ་ལ་གཉིས་ལྷག་མེད་ལ་ཐོན་རེད།

⁴རྟགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་གཉིས་པ་འདི་ནས་འགྲིག།

¹ཁྱད་ཨ་ཁང་འདྲ་རིགས་རྟ་པོ་རེད།

²ང་གཉེན་ཚང་ཆུང་ནག་འཕྲོག་མ་རེད།

³འུ་ལ་གཉིས་ཆུང་རྟ་ཐེ་བཞི་རེད།

⁴རྟགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་གསུམ་པ་འདི་ནས་འགྲིག།

ངས་སྐྱུ་ཤེས་ནི་མིན་ར་དགའ་ནི་ཡིན།

Translation

¹You, the bride's family, are the blue-peacock

²I, the groom's family, am the greenish-white aquatic dragon

³We, two families are the paired peacock and dragon

⁴The initial auspicious omen is indicated here

¹You, the bride's family, are the white-lion

²I, the groom's family, am the red-tiger

³We, two families are the paired lion and tiger

⁴The second auspicious omen is indicated here

¹You, the bride's family, are the stallion

²I, the groom's family, am a black-tempest

³We, two families are *rlung rta sde bzhi*¹

⁴The third auspicious omen is indicated here

¹ *Rlung rta sde bzhi* 'wind-horse images (tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon)'. Here it suggests "suitable and equal."

Song Text as Performed

1'a ro 'di hrin kar nag gnyis gi lo yang lo lo kho kha mtshams ye na go
2'a ro 'di dgong nyi mar drod khol lo yang lo lo kho 'dzoms mas yod ka
3'a ro 'di drod rtags gas bsdad na lo yang lo lo kho skyid zig ye red la
4'a ro 'di skyid rtags gas 'dug nus lo yang lo lo kho smor lam gzo
'debs

1'a ro 'di lo brgyad cu dgu bcu'i lo yang lo lo kho yang kha mtshams
ye na go
2'u gzo'i pha a khu'i tshe dag lo yang lo lo kho ring ngas yo ga
3'a ro 'di'i tshe ring ngas bsdad na lo yang lo lo kho skyid tsig gzo re la
4'a ro ngas skyid rtags gas 'dug nus lo yang lo lo kho smor lam gzo
'debs ba

འོ་ཡེ་.....ཡེ་.....ཡེ་.....ཡེ་.....འོ་ཡང་འོ་འོ་སྐྱ་ཡ་རེ་ཡེ་ལེན་འགོ་

¹འ་རོ་འདི་རྟེན་ཀར་ནག་གཉིས་གི་ལོ་ཡང་ལོ་ལོ་ཁོ་ཁ་མཆམས་ཡེ་ན་གོ།

²འ་རྩ་འདི་དགོང་ཉི་མར་རྟུང་ཁོལ་ལྔ་ཡང་ལྔ་ལྔ་ཁོ་འཇོམས་མས་ཡོད་ཀྱི།

3 འ་ར་འདི་རྟོད་རྟགས་གས་བརྒྱད་ན་ལོ་ཡང་ལོ་ལོ་ཁོ་རྟོད་ཟིག་ཡེ་རེད་ལ།

4འ་རོ་འདི་སྒྱིད་རྟགས་གས་འདུག་རྟེན་ལོ་ཡང་ལོ་ལོ་ཁོ་སྒྱུར་ལས་གཞོ་འདེབས།

¹འ་རོ་འདི་ལོ་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་དགུ་བརྒྱའི་ལོ་ཡང་ལོ་ལོ་ཁོ་ཡང་ཁ་མཆམས་ཡེ་ན་གོ།

²བྱ་གཞིའི་ཕ་མ་སྲུང་ཆོ་དག་ལ་ཡང་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ་རིང་ངས་ཡོག་།

3 འ་ར་འདྲི་ཆེ་རིང་ངས་བསྐྱད་ན་ལ་ཡང་ལ་ལ་ཁོ་གྱིད་ཅིག་གཞོ་རེ་ལ།

¹sprin dkar nag gnyis kyi kha mtshams na
²dgong nyi mar drod khol 'dzoms nas yod
³drod rtag nas bsdad na skyid zhig red
⁴skyid rtag nas 'dug pa'i smon lam 'debs
¹lo brgyad cu dgu bcu'i kha mtshams na
²pha a kha'i tshe thag ring nas yod
³tshe ring nas bsdad na skyid zhig red
⁴skyid rtag nas 'dug pa'i smon lam 'debs

1 རྩུབ་དགར་བཤམ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཁ་མཆོམས་ན།
 2 དགོང་ཉི་མར་རྩོད་ལོལ་འཛོམས་ནས་ཡོད།
 3 རྩོད་རྒྱུ་ནས་བརྒྱུད་ན་རྩྱིད་ཅིག་རེད།
 4 རྩྱིད་རྒྱུ་ནས་འདུག་པའི་རྩོུ་ཁ་ལམ་འདེབས།

1ཨོ་བཟུང་ཅུ་དགུ་བཟུང་ཁ་མཚམས་ན།
2པ་ཨ་ཁུའི་ཆོ་ཐག་རིང་ནས་ཡོད།
3ཆོ་རིང་ནས་བཟུང་ན་མྱིད་ཅིག་རེད།
4མྱིད་རྟག་ནས་འདུག་པའི་སྒོ་ན་ལམ་འདེབས།

¹At the conjunction of the black and white clouds
²The sun is warm
³It's a pleasure to keep the warmth
⁴I wish to keep such pleasure forever

- ¹At the age of eighty to ninety
- ²Elders enjoy long lives
- ³It's a pleasure to live a long life
- ⁴I wish such pleasure is kept for a long time

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¹ངས་བྱིམ་ཚང་ཁྱེད་གྱི་རྒྱལ་རི་བསྟོད།

²རྒྱལ་རི་རྒྱལ་ཐིང་ལྷ་བདུན་རེད།

³པ་མ་ཁྱེད་པའི་རྟོན་འབྲེལ་རེད།

¹ངས་བྱིམ་ཚང་ཁྱེད་གྱི་མདུན་རི་བསྟོད།

²མདུན་རི་རྒྱ་མིག་རང་འབྲེལ་རེད།

³མ་སྲུ་མ་དང་བའི་རྟོན་འབྲེལ་རེད།

ངས་སྒྲུ་ཤེས་ནི་མིན་ར་རྟོན་འབྲེལ་ཡིན།

Translation

¹I will praise your home's back-mountain

²The back mountain is Rgyal srid sna bdun¹

³Symbolizing elders will flourish

¹I will praise your home's front-mountain

²The front mountain is a coiling spring

³Symbolizing elder females will flourish

I don't sing to impress but for good wishes

I learned the first song from an old local singer who sang it at a local gathering. When you asked me about the most unforgettable song I had ever heard, I immediately thought of this song and the time and scene when I first sang publicly in front of many local people. Afterward, I often sang at weddings and other gatherings. I no longer hoped someone would ask me to sing. Locals frequently invited me to weddings and other gatherings when I was about twenty, and I was expected to sing in most cases. I was admired and respected. I felt good about that.

I specialized in response during antiphonal singing. I once

¹ Rgyal srid sna bdun 'seven royal possessions' are *'khor lo rin po che* 'the precious wheel', *nor bu rin po che* 'the precious jewel', *btsun mo rin po che* 'the precious queen', *blon po rin po che* 'the precious minister' *glang po rin po che*, 'the precious elephant' *rta mchog rin po che*, 'the precious horse', and *dmag dpon rin po che* 'the precious general'.

thought I might stop the other side's singers immediately. Sometimes when the other side's singer sang a local *dmangs glu*, a response automatically came to me [of something I'd heard before], and I sang it immediately. I could also create new appropriate replies. I never worried about being unable to respond to songs.

When I attended my cousin's (Rta mgrin tshe lo) second wedding to his current wife from Sgro rong bo, one of the bride's side singers sang a *bcot glu*. A song immediately came to my mind that challenged this song. No one could respond after I sang it.

When I was about thirty-five, I started to lose interest in singing because I had lost self-confidence. My voice had degenerated, I forgot songs, and I am not good-looking. I didn't want to see and hear myself on smartphones and online. I now avoid local weddings and gatherings.

I admire singers from Sog po¹ and Mgo log because of their amazing voices and meaningful songs.

Many local people think the singers from Sgro rong bo are great, but I disagree. I cannot now find a good singer from our home area.

Dmangs glu was traditionally a way of communicating with others and required the ability to choose appropriate songs for the time and context. Singers were judged on the quality of their voice, the number of songs they knew, the meaning of the songs, and their gestures. This has changed with today's audiences only considering voice quality.

DMANGS GLU CONTINUATION-PRESERVATION

Since about 2010, the A mdo TV Station, local governments, and schools have held *dmangs glu* competitions, songfests, and activities in certain areas (Rma lho, Mtsho lho, Mtsho byang Tibetan autonomous prefectures) in Mtsho sngon Province to encourage, spread, and maintain A mdo Tibetan *dmangs glu*. For

¹ Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

example, A mdo TV¹ held a *Tibetan Dmangs Glu Competition*² in 2015 and 2019:

This stage was created for many folk singers to restore and develop Tibetan *dmangs glu* and *dmangs glu* culture. The competition was held twice and played an unprecedented role in the inheritance and development of Tibetan *dmangs glu* and *dmangs glu* culture.³

Awards were given after the 2019 activities during the Second Tibetan *Dmangs Glu Competition Awards Party*.

From 2019-2022, during the Lo sar Mtsho lho (Hainan)⁴ Khul rgyang sgrog brnyan 'phrin khang 'The Mtsho lho Broadcasting and TV Station'⁵ held the *Tibetan Dmangs Glu Performance Program*⁶ four times. In the summer of 2018, Rtse khog (Zeku)⁷ County held a *Tibetan Dmangs glu Competition*.⁸ Mtsho nub (Haixi) Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture held *Tibetan Dmangs Glu Competitions*⁹ in 2015 and in 2018. Schools have also held such activities centered on maintaining Tibetan song culture. Khri ka¹⁰ (Guide) County Nationality Boarding School held *Melody of The Ancestors*¹¹ *Dmangs Glu Competitions* in 2013 and 2015.

Locally, contemporary *dmangs glu* and *dmangs glu* culture advocates include Pad+ma (b. 1993), a local Mdo ba resident who collected and uploaded local *dmangs glu* videos on his WeChat

¹ A mdo TV is an A mdo Tibetan language TV channel
<https://bit.ly/3OHdOfE> 1 August 2022.

² Gangs ljongs me lung official website <https://bit.ly/3l7iaQq>
13 May 2022.

³ Gangs ljongs me lug official website <https://bit.ly/3zkFfYk> 12 May 2022.

⁴ Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

⁵ 'Hainan zhou guangbo dianshitai'.

⁶ Mtsho sngon po website <https://bit.ly/3soSgLW> 12 May 2022.

⁷ Rtse khog County, Rma lho Tibetan Automonous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

⁸ Gangs ljongs me lug official website <https://bit.ly/39X7jGv> 12 May 2022.

⁹ Gangs ljongs me lug official website <https://bit.ly/3lalyd7> 12 May 2022.

¹⁰ Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

¹¹ Mtsho sngon Provincial Government website <https://bit.ly/3NewVwD>
13 May 2022.

channel.¹

REFLECTIONS

Though I (Chos skyong skyabs) didn't know a complete local traditional song melody when I was a child, I frequently imitated local singers, singing and gesturing as I had heard others sing and gesture. Singing was part of our lives. No one can sing well in my family, but we were very fond of local *dmangs glu*. When guests came to our home during Lo sar, we asked them to sing *dmangs glu*, and most obliged. First, my mother or aunt offered a bowl of milk tea and a bowl of yogurt. When the guest finished the first bowl, my family offered another bowl. My mother and aunt did their best to host them. After the guests were full, we asked them to sing *dmangs glu*. My aunt energetically would say, "You can't leave if you don't sing a *dmangs glu* in our home!" Most visitors then sang.

My biggest worry was that someone would ask me to sing *dmangs glu* while I visited local families' homes during Lo sar. Locals believed singing on special days is auspicious.

My uncle's radio was a bit bigger than a book you could easily hold. I remember it vividly. He often extended the antenna to make the reception clearer with less static. I was surprised when I first listened and believed Uncle when he teased me, saying tiny people lived inside the radio.

Every evening there was one A mdo Tibetan language channel that ran for about three and a half hours from six-thirty to ten with news reports, weather forecasts, Ge sar epic stories, and entertainment programs. There was only an hour of news reports, weather forecasts, and Ge sar epic stories in the morning. My family was most interested in the weather forecasts and entertainment sections because only A mdo *dmangs glu* and *rdung len* songs were played. My maternal grandfather remained fond of Ge sar epic stories in 2022.

Before the internet and smartphone, *dmangs glu* activities were among the most enjoyable times in local life. However, around

¹ Step 1: Add WeChat: WMAHASI. Step 2: Click Channel.

2010, electricity became available throughout nearly all of Mdo ba, including the winter pastures. Almost every family soon had a TV and watched *dmangs glu* entertainment during Lo sar, contributing to declining singing activities during Lo sar. Especially in recent years, locals commonly use smartphones and social media. Since 2010, *dmangs glu* activities were no longer held during Lo sar, although *dmangs glu* were still performed at local weddings in 2022.

Most younger locals are losing interest in local traditional songs. The internet was available in the early twenty-first century throughout Mdo ba, with most people having a mobile phone and thus able to access countless songs online. Modern songs from a multitude of cultures have attracted their attention. In addition, local children began attending school when they were around five. I, for example, was never taught local traditional songs during school music classes and cannot recall ever hearing local traditional songs from the school broadcast, illustrating how local children are separated from local traditional song culture.

As Sgrol ma skyabs mentioned, local elders and some young locals who didn't attend school continue to appreciate local traditional songs. Local native Lhun 'grub worries his children and grandchildren will be unable to sing *dmangs glu* very much in Tibetan (Lhun 'grub 2020:207-208). Pad+ma rig 'dzin voices similar concerns focused on Smyung gnas:

In 2019, many children attended school and had never experienced Smyung gnas. Furthermore, some children may not be acquainted unless they are from the same local community. . . . It would be very positive if local primary school students were allowed to join in Smyung gnas in recognition of the value of traditional cultural activities that are rapidly changing (2021:69).

Local traditional lyrics relate to a pre-modern lifestyle, e.g., black yak-hair tents, saddles, wild yaks, rifles, and livestock, igniting elders' vivid memories of their past. However, local youth did not have such experiences.

Sbra mthing smug sgo dar khra khra can,
The black yak-hair tent with colorful door-flag

Lug sprin dkar 'dra zhig ri la skor,
Sheep grazing on the mountain resemble a white cloud

Rta 'do ba ri dwags 'dra bo
The horse I ride resembles a wild animal

Most local traditional songs are performed without musical instruments, further distancing them from today's "modern" youth.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on personal experiences attending a local love song gathering in 2003 at my clan's summer pasture, visiting love song clubs in town, and observing *dmangs glu* performances during Lo sar and weddings, this paper specifically explores local traditional songs and musical instruments and how and when they became popular in my home area. By employing Sgrol ma skyabs' illustration of a local *dmangs glu* singer via his life story, this paper further reveals the local lifestyle, songscape, and local traditional music culture. By examining *dmangs glu*, *la ye*, and *rdung len*, including Tibetan musical instruments in Mdo ba, this paper also shows how the advent of "development" and "modernity" such as radios, TVs, phones, and Apps in Tibetan communities influence local *dmangs glu* culture and songscape transition from traditional to modern, including changing interests in song genres.

Again, this paper is not about *all* Tibetan traditional songs but rather *dmangs glu*, *la ye*, and *rdung len* in Mdo ba.

Tibetan traditional songs and singing are not immune from contemporary social and cultural influences. For example, I interviewed five young Mdo ba residents and 133 Tibetan teenagers in Dar lag County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture who expressed limited interest in Tibetan traditional songs. In contrast, modern songs keenly interested them, which they accessed through the internet and mobile phones via WeChat and Kwai,¹ among other platforms.

¹ Kuaishou (Kwai) was the second-largest Chinese short-video

While Mdo ba Tibetans remain pastoral, no families used yak-hair tents in 2023. Instead, they lived in canvas tents from the late fifth lunar month to the late eighth lunar month or in brick houses in the Town Center and winter camps. Fencing and assigned pastures have ended local mobile pastoralism.

Traditional Tibetan songs may be compared to wearing Tibetan robes and eating *rtsam ba*, with interest reflecting age and generation. For example, as mentioned above, older people enjoy traditional local songs while younger people are less interested. Meanwhile, Tibetan robes were worn daily by many older local women but rarely by girls attending school or who had attended school. However, at large gatherings (horseraces, Smyung gnas) in the 2010s and early 2020s, only some attendees younger than fifteen did *not* wear Tibetan robes. These were moments when there was a desire to express Tibetan identity and community, and the same was true on a smaller scale during small Lo sar gatherings and local weddings. While *rtsam ba* was a preferred food choice for older residents and rarely denigrated by any local, it was not a food of choice for young Mdo ba residents in 2023.

Nearly all Mdo ba preteens and teenagers attend or have attended government schools and thus were separated from Mdo ba elders for much of the year. These young people had close regular encounters with social media and all the contemporary global music it provided. Never directly experiencing nomadic life and the opportunities provided to sing and enrich a song repertoire with vocabulary and pastoralist metaphors resulted in declining interest in traditional Tibetan singing.

Most young Mdo ba Tibetans in 2023 are eager to see and experience the world and life beyond Mdo ba and much of what traditional Tibetan songs represent. Traditional songs and performances today are best understood as invoking nostalgic longing for a past somewhere on a continuum of fading to disappeared. In recognition of this, I encourage micro-studies of traditional Tibetan songs and music and all aspects of life in Tibetan

areas, particularly by local Tibetans, as life and culture rapidly change.

PHOTOGRAPHS

FIG 1. Gyu lo (b. 1974) came to the bride's home with the groom and six companions and sang *dmangs glu* at Bsam 'grub rgyal's winter pasture in 2022 (Pad+ma).



FIG 2. Local *dmangs glu* singer Sha bo skyabs (b. 1975) sings *dmangs glu* at the groom's home as part of his neighbor's daughter's entourage (Mdo ba Town Center 2022, Pad+ma).



FIG 3 G.yung drung rgyal (b. 1976) sings a *ja glu* 'tea-song' soon after arriving at the groom's home with the bride and six companions in Mdo ba Town Center in 2022. He holds *ja dar* 'tea-silk' that he offered to a cook. The groom's side then offered a meal (unidentified photographer).



FIG 4. Snying lo (b. 1965) sings *dmangs glu* at a *khang ston* 'new house celebration' and holds a white *kha btags* he raises and lowers following the song's rhythm while holding a microphone in his left hand (Mdo ba Town Center 2022, Pad+ma).



FIG 5. Rgya b+ha (b. 1958) responds to a *bcol glu* 'entrusting' 'enjoining' song' from the bride's side at the end of a wedding in Rin chen don 'grub's home in Mdo ba in 2019 (Bkra shis rab brtan).



APPENDIX: TERMS AND SELECTED EXPLANATIONS

dmangs

- Goldstein et al. (2001): people, masses (828)
- Joschke (1881): the common people, populace, multitude, vulgar (422)
- Das (1902): the populace, mob, common folk (981)
- Stag 'bum thar (2016): mass (609)

glu

- Joschke (1881): song, tune (81)
- Das (1902): song (258)
- Huadan Zhaxi et al. (1994): song (53)
- Goldstein et al. (2001): song, to sing (210)
- Anton-Luca (2002): "*Glu* (folk song) and *la ye* (love song) make up two of the most popular song genres in A Mdo" (178).
- Anton-Luca (2002): Colloquial usage of the two terms *glu* and *la ye* carries a degree of ambiguity. While *glu* translates simply as 'song', it also means 'folk song'. *Glu*, as 'folk song', denotes A mdo folk songs in general (*dmangs glu*) and a specific genre within the latter for which no separate term exists. I employ *glu* to refer to this specialized genre (179).
- Li Yingxia (2008): "勒"是一种高亢悠扬、奔放自由、抒情优美的民歌。歌曲内容与藏族人民的的生活息息相关，无论是放牧、打猎 还是喜庆、休憩时，人们都会随口唱出"勒"来，可以说是最普遍、流传最广泛的曲种之一，擅长叙事和抒发情感，有着很强的艺术表现力 (74).

(My translation) "*Le*" is a type of *dmangs glu* with a high pleasant melody expressing emotion in free rhythm. The content of *le* is closely related to Tibetan life, whether during herding, hunting, celebrations, and leisure. We can say that it is one of the most common, widespread song genres.

- Craun (2011): The term *dmangs glu*, like the Chinese term 民歌 *min ge* (folk song), is used by some Tibetans to represent all genres of traditional folk songs created by the Tibetan people. Besides the generic term 'song', the second meaning of the term *glu* is a specific traditional genre of a cappella Amdo Tibetan folk songs. Within this genre, sub-categories exist. A sub-category of the broad *glu* genre is simply the *glu* praise ballad. Other *glu* sub-categories include cultural songs, question-and-answer songs, with songs,

and origin songs. Genres of folk songs that are not included in the Amdo Tibetan *glu* genre include sung dance music and vocal songs with instrumental music (79).

- Thurston (2012) writes: “*Dmangs glu* may be performed on a variety of occasions and have almost no restrictions on their performance” (57). ... In comparing *dmangs glu* and *la gzhas*, Thurston further suggests: *Mdangs glu* and *la gzhas* employ essentially the same register, meter, and metaphorical language as the speeches described above [*sa bshad*, *gnas bshad*]. Their natural metaphors cover a wide range of topics, including flora and fauna of the Plateau and significant geographical features (57).
- Stag 'bum thar (2016): song (130)
- G.yang skyabs rdo rje (2021): *Dmangs glu* are sung without instrumental accompaniment and are suitable for all audiences on happy occasions. *Dmangs glu* often praise mountains, rivers, forests, and environments that nurture people and compliment *bla ma*, parents, and well-known and kindhearted people (306).
- Skäl bzang rdo rje (2021): ལྷ་ཞེས་པ་ནི་དབྱངས་རྟའི་འདེགས་འཛོག་ལ་བརྒྱན་ནས་ལེན་གྱིན་པའི་དག་གི་རྒྱ་ཆལ་དུ་གོ་བར་འཐད་དོ། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༡༩ Glu zhes pa ni dbyangs rta'i 'degs 'jog la brgyus nas len gyin pa'i ngag gi sgyu rtsal du go bar 'thad do" (13).
(My translation): *Glu* is an oral musical art with a melodic rhythm.
- Skäl bzang rdo rje (2021): ཨ་མ་དྲེ་དམངས་རྒྱ་ནི་གསལ་བྱེད་དཔེ་ཡིས་བརྒྱན་ཅིང་དོན་ཆེན་ཆོག་གིས་སྐྱན་པར་སྐྱལ་པའི་དག་གི་རྒྱ་ཆལ་སྐྱ་ན་མེད་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༢༠ A mdo'i dmangs glu ni gsal byed dpe yis brgyan cing don chen tshig gis snyan par skul pa'i ngag gi sgyu rtsal bla na med pa zhig yin" (20)
(My translation): A mdo *dmangs glu* is an oral art of metaphors and similes.
- Skäl bzang rdo rje (2021): ཨ་མ་དྲེ་དམངས་རྒྱ་ནི་བྱིའི་ཆ་ནས་ཆོན་པ་གསུམ་གྱིས་བྱལ་ཅིང་ལྷ་མ་གཉིས་ནི་དཔེ་དང་བྱི་མ་གཅིག་ནི་དཔེ་ཅན་དུ་སྒྲུང་། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༢༢ A mdo'i dmangs glu ni spyi'i cha nas tshan pa gsum gyis grub cing snga ma gnyis ni dpe dang phyi ma gcig ni dpe can du snang (22).
(My translation): *Dmangs glu* typically have three stanzas, with the first two being metaphors and the third stanza a simile.
- Sturman (2019): Wedding songs typically express good wishes for the new couple, though some express sadness at the departure of a son or daughter.

They include solo and choral songs (both in unison and antiphonally), divided into several types according to the various stages of elaborate wedding ceremonies, which may last several days. Drinking songs are sung at parties and typically praise important guests and urge them to enjoy themselves, while beer or liquor is offered in a bowl. *Lu (glu)*, also the generic term for song, now also known as "folk songs," *dmangs-glu* is another type of celebratory song. They are normally sung solo by a performer standing with their right arm extended while cupping their left hand to their ear (3).

- **Snying mo tshe ring (2017):** བོད་ཀྱི་དམངས་སྐུ་ལ་ནང་གསེས་ཀྱི་དབྱེ་བ་རྣམས་ཙམ་བྱེས་ན་ ༡. ངལ་ཚུལ་གྱི་སྐུ་ཤོར་གཞན། ཁྱེད་གཞན། འོ་མ་བཞོ་བའི་སྐུ། གདུང་མ་འགྱུགས་པའི་སྐུ། གཡུལ་རྩུང་པའི་སྐུ། ཐགས་འཐག་པའི་སྐུ། ༢. སྐུ་ཁ་མཆར་ཞུགས་པའི་སྐུ་དང་བསྟོན་སྐུ། ཁ་མཆར་སྐྱེད་སྐུ། ཉན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་སྐུ། བཟླ་ཤིས་འཇོག་པའི་སྐུ། ༣. སྐུ་ཤགས། ༤. ལ་གཞན། ༥. གཞན། ཤོག་ངས་ ༢༡ **Bod kyi dmangs glu la nang gses kyi dbye ba rags tsam phyes na. 1. Ngalt sol gyi glu (Ar gzhas, gyang gzhas, 'o ma bzho ba'i glu, gdung ma 'gyogs pa'i glu, g.yu rdung pa'i glu, thags 'thag pa'i glu). 2. glu kha mtshar (mgo rtsom pa'i glu dang bstod glu, kha mtshar, smreng glu, rten 'brel gyi glu, bkra shis 'jog pa'i glu). 3. glu shags. 4. la gzhas. 5. gzhas (21).**

(My translation): Tibetan *dmangs glu* roughly include five categories; 1. Labor songs (concrete work songs, earth wall construction songs, milking songs, top roof beam placement songs, threshing songs, and weaving songs); 2. Songs of humor (songs of begging, praise songs, songs of humor, songs of lamentation, celebration songs, and songs of farewell); 3. *Glu shags* (competing by answering the content of one song with the words/content of another); 4. Love songs; and 5. Modern songs.

rdung len

- Joschke (1881), Das (1902), Bell (1920), Pad+ma rdo rje (1989), Huadan Zhaxi (1994), Goldstein (2001), Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002), and Stag 'bum thar (2016) do not list *rdung len*.

la ye

- Goldstein (2001): songs sung on mountains by herders (1057). "La ye" is not listed in Joschke (1881), Das (1902), Bell (1920), Pad+ma rdo rje (1989), Huadan Zhaxi (1994), and Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002).

- **Stag 'bum thar (2016):** ག.རི་གླུ་མེ་ལ་གླུ། ༢.ཨ་མདོའི་དམངས་ཁྲོད་ཀྱི་གླུ་གཞས་རིགས་ཤིག་ལྟེ་ཚོག་སྒྱུར་པ་ལ་ཆེ་བ་
ཡིག་འབྲུ་བདུན་ཅན་ཡིན་ལ་ནང་དོན་ནི་ཨོ་མོའི་བཞེ་དྲང་སྟོན་པ་གཙོ་ཆེ། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༥༠། **1. Ri glu ste la glu 2. A**
mdo'i dmangs khrod kyi glu gzhas rigs shig ste. Tshig sbyor phal che ba yig
'bru bdun can yin la. Nang don ni pho mo'i brtse dung ston pa gtso che
(601).

(My translation) 1. mountain song, 2. A type of A mdo song, most verses consist of seven syllables, and the content is about love between men and women.

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TIBETAN TERMS

'ba' stod pad+ma dpang rgyal

འབའ་སྟོད་པད་དབང་རྒྱལ།

'brong rw'i sgra snyan

འབྲོང་རའི་སྒྲ་སྟན།

'bum mtsho skyid འབུམ་མཚོ་སྟོན།

'ja' mo འཇའ་མོ།

'jam dbyangs bzhad pa

འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཟད་པ།

a khu pad ma ཨ་ཁུ་པད་མ།

a khu sman tog ཨ་ཁུ་སྐྱེན་རྟོག།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

bag ston བག་སྟོན།

bcol glu བཅོལ་གླུ།

bde chen bya btang kun dga'

chos 'phels བདེ་ཆེན་བྱ་བཏང་ཀུན་དགའ་

ཆོས་འཕེལ།

bde mo 'jog pa'i skor

བདེ་མོ་འཇོག་པའི་སྐར།

bde skyid tshe ring

བདེ་སྟོན་ཚེ་རིང་།

bla brang ལྷ་བང་།

bla brang ma ལྷ་བང་མ།

bla ma ལྷ་མ།

blon chen ལྷོན་ཆེན།

bkra shis 'jog pa'i glu

བརྒྱ་ཤིས་འཇོག་པའི་གླུ།

bod gling བོད་གླིང་།

bod kha ba can gyi pha khu

rnam བོད་ཁ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་པ་ཁུ་རྩ་མཁའ།

bod kyi dmangs glu 'gran sdur

skabs gnyis pa'i bya dga'i

gzengs skyes stsol ba'i

dgong tshogs བོད་གྱི་དམངས་སྒྲུ་འགན་

སྒྲུ་རྩམས་གཉིས་པའི་བྱ་དགའི་གཞིངས་སྟེན་སྒྲུ་ལ་བའི་

དགོང་ཚོགས།
 bon po བོན་པོ།
 brtson 'grus rgya mtso
 བརྩོན་འགྲུས་རྩུ་མཚོ།
 bsam 'grub rgyal བསམ་འགྲུབ་རྒྱལ།
 bsang chu བསང་ལྷ།
 bsod nams bkra shis
 བསོད་ནམས་བརྒྱ་ཤིས།
 bstod glu བསྟོད་གླུ།
 bzhi ba'i smyung gnas
 བཞི་བའི་སྤྱང་གནས།
 chos skyong skyabs
 ཚོས་སྤྱང་སྤྱབས།
 chos thog ཚོས་ཐོག
 chu dmar leb ལྷ་དམར་ལེབ།
 chu khog ལྷ་ཁོག
 dar zhing དར་ཞིང་།
 dar zhing bde 'dzoms dga'
 tshal gling
 དར་ཞིང་བདེ་འཛོམས་དགའ་ཚལ་སྤྱིང་།
 dbal mang paN Di ta
 དབལ་མང་པཎ་ཌི་ཏ།
 dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།
 dga' ldan དགའ་མཚན།
 dge 'dun rgya mtsho
 དགེ་འདུན་རྩུ་མཚོ།
 dkon mchog དགོན་མཚོག
 dmangs glu དམངས་གླུ།
 dpal mgon དཔལ་མགོན།
 dpon skor དཔོན་སྐོར།
 dri glu འྲི་གླུ།
 g.yu 'brug གཡུ་འབྲུག
 g.yu rngog bsam gtan rgya
 mtsho གཡུ་རྩོག་བསམ་གཏན་རྩུ་མཚོ།
 g.yung drung rgyal གཡུང་རྩུང་རྒྱལ།
 gcan tsha གཅན་ཚ།
 gcan tsha thang གཅན་ཚ་ཐང་།

gcod las གཙོང་ལས།
 gcod pa don grub གཙོང་པ་དོན་གྲུབ།
 gdu b+he གདུ་ཞེ།
 ge sar གེ་སར།
 gling bu གླིང་བུ།
 glu གླུ།
 glu bar mo 'di dang gcig 'dra
 yin གླུ་བར་མ་འདི་དང་གཅིག་འདྲ་ཡིན།
 glu bar mo bar nas gngang nga
 zig གླུ་བར་མ་བར་ནས་གནང་ང་ཟེག
 glu bar mo dbugs kyis mi
 lcogs gi
 གླུ་བར་མོ་དབུགས་ཀྱིས་མི་ལྷོགས་གི།
 glu dbyangs གླུ་དབྱངས།
 glu gar rgyal གླུ་གར་རྒྱལ།
 glu shags གླུ་ཤགས།
 gnam thar tshe ring
 གནས་ཐར་ཚེ་རིང་།
 gnas 'gro bu mo གནས་འགོ་བུ་མོ།
 gnas bshad གནས་བཤད།
 gu ru གུ་རུ།
 gya ston གྱ་སྟོན།
 gyang glu གྱང་གླུ།
 ja dar ཇ་དར།
 ja glu ཇ་གླུ།
 kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།
 kan su'u ཀན་སུ་འུ།
 khyod rang dmangs glu la
 dga' 'am deng rabs glu
 dbyangs la dga' rgyu
 mtshan ci རྩོད་རང་དམངས་སྤྱུ་ལ་ཉན་པར་
 དགའ་འམ་དེང་རབས་སྤྱུ་དབྱངས་ལ་ཉན་པར་དགའ།
 རྩུ་མཚན་ཅི།
 kha b'i zhabs rje ཁ་བའི་ཞབས་རྒྱེ།
 kha btags ཁ་བརྟགས།
 khang ston ཁང་སྟོན།
 khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

khyu lu ལུ་ལུ།
 klu mo ལུ་མོ།
 klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།
 kun bzang rdo rje ལུན་བཟང་རྡོ་རྗེ།
 la ye ལ་ཡེ།
 la gzhas ལ་གཞས།
 lcags byams ལཱགས་བྱམས།
 ldong la re ལྡོང་ལ་རེ།
 lha mo ལྷ་མོ།
 lhun 'grub ལུན་འབྲུབ།
 lo sar ལོ་སར།
 lo yang lo ལོ་ཡང་ལོ།
 lug sprin dkar 'dra zhig ri la skor

ལུག་སྒྲིན་དཀར་འདྲ་ཞིག་རི་ལ་སྐོར།
 mdo ba མདོ་བ།
 mdo ba bon rgya མདོ་བ་བོན་རྒྱ།
 mdo sngags dar rgyas gling

མདོ་སྐྱགས་དར་བྱས་སྒྲིང་།
 mdzo མཛོ།
 mgar rtse མགར་རེ།
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 mgo skor མགོ་སྐོར།
 mkha' 'gro mtsho མཁའ་འགོ་མཚོ།
 mkhar byams མཁར་བྱམས།
 mkhyen 'grub མཁྱེན་འབྲུབ།
 mnga' ris མངའ་རིས།
 mnga' ris sgra snyan

མངའ་རིས་སྒྲ་སྟན།
 mthun sgril gyi rang sgra
 མཐུན་སྒྲིལ་གྱི་རང་སྒྲ།
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།
 mtsho lho khul rgyang sgrog
 brnyan 'phrin khang

མཚོ་ལྷོ་ལུང་སྒྲིག་བརྟན་འཕྲིན་ཁང་།
 mtsho nub མཚོ་ནུབ།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒྲོན།
 myi skal མྱི་སྐལ།

na chung rtсед ra ན་ཅུང་རེད་ར།
 nam mkha' ནམ་མཁའ།
 ne'u ston gyi glu ནེ་འུ་སྟོན་གྱི་གླུ།
 pad+ma སཱད་མ།
 pad+ma rdo rje སཱད་མ་རྡོ་རྗེ།
 pad ma bsam 'grub
 སཱད་མ་བསམ་འབྲུབ།
 pad+ma rig 'dzin སཱཏ་རིག་འཛིན།
 phun tshogs dbang rgyal
 ཕུན་ཚྭགས་དབང་བྱལ།
 phynging glu ཕྱིང་གླུ།
 ra rgan ར་རྒན།
 ra ston gyi glu ར་སྟོན་གྱི་གླུ།
 rang grol rdo rje རང་གྲོལ་རྡོ་རྗེ།
 rdo red རྡོ་རེད།
 rdo rje rab brtan རྡོ་རྗེ་རབ་བརྟན།
 rdung len རུང་ལེན།
 reb gong རེབ་གོང་།
 reb gong pa 'jigs med bsam

grub རེབ་གོང་པ་འཛིགས་མེད་བསམ་བྱུབ།
 rgya b+ha རྒྱ་མ།
 rgya gling རྒྱ་གླིང་།
 rgya mtsho རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 ri spyang རི་སྐལ།
 rin chen don 'grub

རིན་ཆེན་དོན་འབྲུབ།
 rin kho རིན་ཁོ།
 rkang gling རྟང་གླིང་།
 rlung rta sde bzhi རུང་རྟ་སྡེ་བཞི།
 rma chu རམ་ཅུ།
 rma lho རམ་ལྷོ།
 rogs 'gal ba'i skor
 རོགས་འགལ་བའི་སྐོར།
 rogs dran pa'i skor
 རོགས་དྲན་པའི་སྐོར།
 rogs mthun pa'i skor
 རོགས་མཐུན་པའི་སྐོར།

rogs rtsod pa'i skor

རོགས་རྩོད་པའི་སྐོར།

rong bo grub chen རོང་བོ་གུབ་ཆེན།

rta 'do ba ri dwags 'dra bo

རྟ་འདྲོ་བ་རི་དགས་འདྲ་བོ།

rta kho རྟ་ཁོ།

rta rdo རྟ་རྟོ།

rta mgrin tshe lo རྟ་མཐིན་ཙེ་ལོ།

rtse khog རྟེ་ཁོག།

rtse mgo རྟེ་མགོ།

ru khag རུ་ཁག།

sa bshad ས་བཤད།

sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱལ།

sangs rgyas bkra shis

སངས་རྒྱལ་བཟ་ཤིས།

sbra mthing smug sgo dar

སྐྱེ་མཐེང་སྤྱུག་སྐྱོ་དར་ཁ་ཐག།

sg'i snga ri 'di la chags

ཤིག་'jog སྐའི་ཤ་རི་འདི་ལ་ཆགས་ཤིག་འཛིག།

sgra snyan སྤྱུ་སྟན།

sgro rong bo སྟོ་རོང་བོ།

sgrol dkar skyabs སྟོལ་དཀར་སྐྱམས།

sgrol ma སྟོལ་མ།

sgrol ma skyabs སྟོལ་མ་སྐྱམས།

sgrung glu སྟུང་གླུ།

sha bo skyabs ཤ་བོ་སྐྱམས།

sha bo bkra shis ཤ་བོ་བཟ་ཤིས།

sha bo don 'grub ཤ་བོ་དོན་འབྱུང།

shags glu ཤགས་གླུ།

shar skal ldan rgya mtsho

ཤར་སྐལ་ལྷན་བྱ་མཚོ།

sher bstan ཤེར་བསྟན།

si khron སི་ཁྲོན།

skad 'phrin སྐད་འཕྲིན།

skal bzang bkra shis

སྐལ་བཟང་བཟ་ཤིས།

skal bzang rdo rje སྐལ་བཟང་རྡོ་རྗེ།

skal bzang bstan 'dzin

སྐལ་བཟང་བསྟན་འཛིན།

skyo glu སྐྱོ་གླུ།

smyung gnas སྤྱུང་གནས།

snying rje na rje rgyu gan na

'dug ལྷིང་རྗེ་ན་རྗེ་བྱ་གན་ན་འདུག།

sog po སོག་པོ།

stag lha rgyal སྟག་ལྷ་རྒྱལ།

stag 'bum thar སྟག་འབུམ་ཐར།

thun te ཐུན་ཏེ།

thun rin ཐུན་རིན།

tshe brtan ཙེ་བརྟན།

tshe dpa' ཙེ་དཔལ།

tshe dpal skybas ཙེ་དཔལ་སྐྱབས།

tshe ring ཙེ་རིང་།

tshe ring dbang 'dus

ཙེ་རིང་དབང་འདུས།

tsho ba ཙེ་བ།

yo lag ཡོ་ལག།

yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།

zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Anduo 安多

Changba 唱吧

Dari 达日

Deang 德昂

Duowa 多哇

Gannan 甘南

Gansu 甘肃

Guashize 瓜什则

Guide 贵得	Qinghai weishi 青海卫视
Guoluo 果洛	Qukuhu 曲库呼
Hainan 海南	Qumalai 曲麻莱
Hainan zhou guangbo	<i>mu</i> 亩
dianshitai 海南州广播电视台	Tongde 同德
Haixi 海西	Tongren 同仁
Henan 河南	Tsingtao, Qingdao 青岛
Huangnan 黄南	<i>weixin</i> 微信
Huadan Zhaxi 华旦扎西	Xiahe 夏河
Maqu 玛曲	Xining 西宁
<i>minge</i> 民歌	Yushu 玉树
PaPa 啪啪	Zeku 泽库
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TIBETAN ARTIFACTS: PRAYER WHEELS, WORN RELIGIOUS ITEMS, TIBETAN TENTS, AND PERSONAL ORNAMENTS IN 2022

'Jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐྱེལ་པ། (Jiayangjian 加羊尖)*

ABSTRACT

Personal experiences and histories of local older Tibetan religious practitioners illustrate the religious and cultural practices of Stag lung Mtha' ba, Khang sar Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Goulou) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Highlighting the significant roles that religious items, personal ornaments, Tibetan tents, and the memories of their use play in local lives, the article provides insights into the importance of the community's religion and traditions. Interviews with local elders about their life experiences, religious items, and personal ornaments enrich our understanding of how symbols of faith connect individuals to their cultural heritage and history, offering a deeper appreciation of the significance of these items, including their symbolism and function. By showcasing the importance of personal experiences and histories in understanding the significance of religious practices and objects in a specific Tibetan community, this paper contributes to the literature on Tibetan religion and culture, offering a unique perspective on the diverse and rich traditions locally maintained and practiced and highlighting the importance of cultural heritage and history in shaping local identity and values.

KEYWORDS

thar 'khor, Tibetan artifacts, Tibetan prayer wheels, A mdo (Amdo) Tibetan, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai), Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi), Stag lung Monastery, *thar mdo*, *sbra leb*, *nag tshang*

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INTRODUCTION

In exploring various aspects of Tibetan material culture, including prayer wheels and other religious items, yak hair tents, and personal ornaments, this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of Tibetan culture and society by analyzing these objects and their cultural significance. The paper draws on ethnographic research conducted in a Tibetan area of China from 2020-2023 and historical and cultural studies of Tibetan material culture. Part of this research was based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five Tibetans, participant observations of their everyday lives, and abridged versions of autobiographical narratives these elders provided. All interlocutors lived in Stag lung Mtha' ba¹ and were natives of Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Goulou) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China.

While the literature on Tibetan prayer wheels already exists, for example, Google Scholar lists 242 results for "Tibetan prayer wheels,"² several of these articles are largely descriptive (Stanley 1868, Martin 1987, Modi 1918, Ladner 2000, and Winder 1992). There appears to be a dearth of studies focusing on the meaning of prayer wheels to individual Tibetan religious practitioners and the history of this meaning and practice.

In Part One, I introduce Don skyid (b. 1946), who shares the

¹ About 300 people lived in Stag lung Mtha' ba in 2023. Most were older parents and grandparents of adjacent Stag lung Monastery monks and *bla ma*. Many residents spent time circumambulating the entire monastery and temples, large Buddha images, and stupas within the monastery; prostrating to stupas and Buddha images; attending teachings by monastery *bla ma*; and joining monastery rituals. Stag lung Mtha' ba residents refer to where they live as "Mtha' ba" to local people and "Stag lung Mtha' ba" when, for example, they visit other monasteries in the area when asked where they are from. In this text, I refer to Stag lung Mtha' ba as "Mtha' ba Community." See <https://bit.ly/42HNzNz> 17 May 2023) for a discussion of *mtha' ba 'tsowa'* in A mdo and details on the "Eight Lhadé Tsowa" for a monastery in present-day Khri ka (Trika, Guide) County, Mtsho sngon Province.

² <https://bit.ly/3nRpapD> 12 May 2023.

story of her most prized possession – a *thar 'khor* 'prayer wheel'.¹ In Part Two, Don skyid describes her family's *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* prayer wheel, the history of its acquisition, how it is used, and why.

Part Three sketches the lives of Chos mdzad (b. 1938) and his wife, Yi po (b. 1941), and describes their prayer wheels, including a *thar 'khor*, two *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo*, a *ma Ni' 'khor lo*, and a *'then 'khor*.

Part Four outlines Bde sgrol's (b. 1947) life and describes her *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*.

Part Five examines the religious items Don skyid wears, and Part Six gives the history of her family's housing (tents and houses).

Part Seven focuses on Tshe brtan's (b. 1968) life and the background of his precious *mchong 'agate* his father gave him that he wears around his neck.

Collectively, these personal experiences and histories of local elderly Tibetan religious practitioners provide insights into Mtha' ba Community culture, highlighting the significant roles that religious items and personal ornaments play in the lives of locals.

The Appendix provides a list of relevant monasteries (Table 1), place names (Table 2), and people (Table 3).

The terms used in this paper are what I was told by the elders I interviewed. I do not represent them as "standard" and representative of life and religious practice throughout the vast area where Tibetans live.

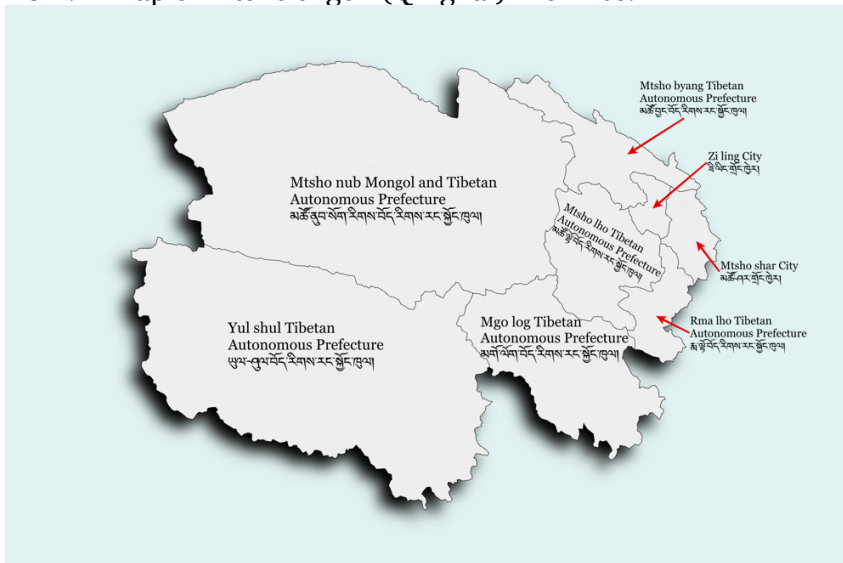
¹ A *'khor lo* 'prayer wheel' containing a *Thar mdo* scripture is a *thar 'khor*.

MAPS

FIG 1. PR China.¹



FIG 2. A map of Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province.²



¹ Edited version of <https://bit.ly/42W1jnv> 15 May 2023.

² Edited version of <https://bit.ly/3nTtDbr> 15 May 2023.

FIG 3. Counties in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.¹

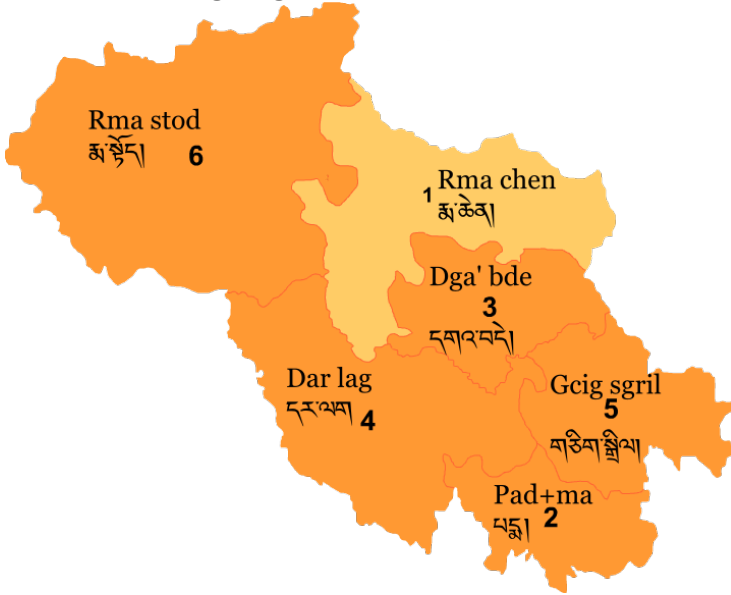
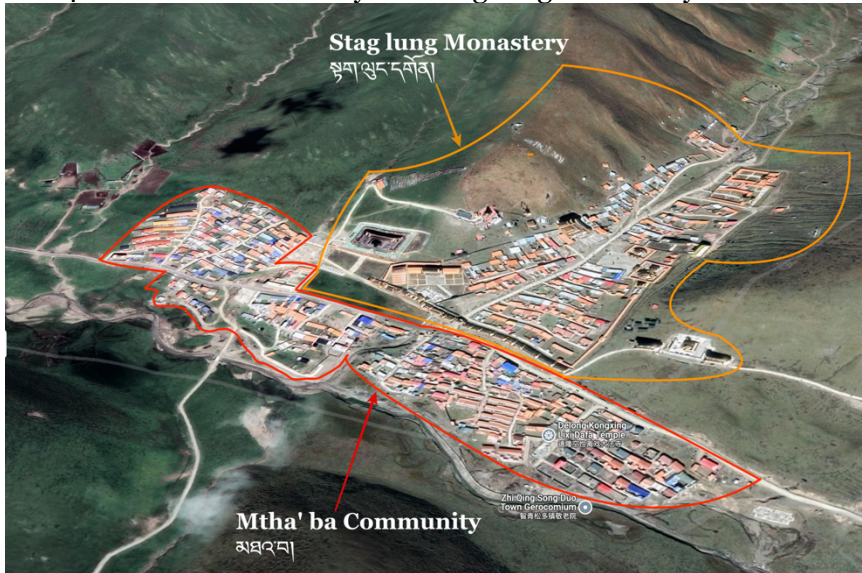


FIG 4. Mtha' ba Community and Stag lung Monastery.²



PART ONE: DON SKYID'S *THAR 'KHOR 'PRAYER WHEEL*:

¹ Edited version of <https://bit.ly/2Oyoz6g> 15 May 2023.

² The map is an edited version of <https://bit.ly/3LZhJ7L>. Mtha' ba Community is inside the red outline. The monastery is within the orange outline.

"IT MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME"

Don skyid summarizes her life; the prayer wheel's history, value, and restoration in 2021; and how her attitude toward jewelry changed. Two of her sons (Phyogs las rnam rgyal (b. 1971) and Snang gsal rgya mtsho (b. 1987) live near her in Stag lung Monastery.

DON SKYID'S THAR 'KHOR

FIG 5. Don skyid with a prayer wheel at her home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



FIG 6. Don skyid with the *thar 'khor* at her home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



FIG 7. Parts of the *thar 'khor*: (1) *gnam 'khor lo rtse dgu* 'top cover', (2) *sked thag* 'silver band', (3) *tog* 'top', (4) *dong tse* 'coins',¹ (5) *sa pad+ma 'dab brgyad* 'soil, eight-leaved lotus', (6) *'khor lte*² 'rotating sleeve', (7) *'khor lo'i yu ba* 'handle', and (8) *'khor rdo* 'prayer wheel stone' (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).³

¹ See <https://tinyurl.com/3sjef5t5> 11 August 2023 (posted by Trine Brox), which discusses "prayer wheel wear pads" in Lha sa and Kathmandu.

² This *'khor lte* is made of yak horn and turns with the prayer wheel atop a coin that eventually becomes very thin (wears out) and the opening widens that the prayer wheel's central pillar passes through.

³ A weight that aids the prayer wheel's rotation. The green (imitation) turquoise also serves as a weight aiding the prayer wheel's rotation.



Religious practice is significant in Don skyid's life. The following account is a personal narrative of a Tibetan woman's life, experiences, and beliefs. It provides insight into her daily routine, family life, religious practices, and cultural traditions. This account also describes her poverty-stricken early life, her marriage arranged by family members, and her struggle to survive while raising eight children. This provides cultural and historical context, such as restrictions on religious activities during certain periods and the value placed on hard work by Tibetan society.

Overall, this narrative offers a personal and intimate look into the life and beliefs of a Tibetan woman and provides a perspective on Tibetan culture and traditions.

DON SKYID'S ACCOUNT: A PRAYER WHEEL AND HER LIFE

This '*khor lo* 'prayer wheel' is my only precious thing. I used to have a few ornaments. My parents and husband (Bsod dar, 1943-2016) gave me some, and I bought some. I spin my '*khor lo* early every morning while chanting *Yig brgya*

'Hundred Syllable Mantra'¹ for about an hour. Other than that, I don't have a specific time for spinning my '*khoro*', but sometimes I spin it later in the day when I am free.

My husband and I were very poor when we first married. Three yaks were all we had. My husband's cousin ('Phrin las rgya mtsho 19?? -1970)² and my brother (Rab brtan 1944-1999) arranged our marriage. It never occurred to us to have a wedding party because we were too busy struggling to survive.

I gave birth eleven times. One son and two daughters died when they were very young. My other children include two monks, three laypeople, and three daughters. My husband passed away in 2016 from lung cancer. I miss him a lot. After his death, I became a nun.

I didn't go to a nunnery, and I don't wear robes like nuns. I only wear red clothes and cut my hair short like a nun. Importantly, I live by the nuns' rules - no stealing, killing, sexual activities, lying, or proclaiming I am a guru.

I needed to find a *bla ma* and promise him to become a nun face-to-face, so I went to a local *bla ma*, Tshul khribs bzang po.

I forgot to mention that after my husband's death, I stopped eating *bshas sha* 'meat from butchered animals'. Now I only eat *shi sha* 'meat from animals not killed for human consumption'. My husband killed many livestock for our family. I stopped eating *bshas sha* to reduce his sinful deeds [killing livestock].

As I grew older, I accumulated a necklace that was about twenty small coral pieces, two turquoise, and four amber pieces. My family once decided to go to Lha sa, but we didn't have enough money, so my husband and I sold my amber and used that money to travel to Lha sa.

Later, as my children got older, some married and had their own families. Even my grandchildren went to school. I had fewer family responsibilities and had an opportunity to live near the local monastery [Stag lung], so my husband and I built an adobe house here and attended winter religious teachings. I gave all my ornaments to the *bla ma* who gave religious teachings. It was good to offer my ornaments to my *bla ma* rather than sell them or give them to my children. My family members gave me most of my ornaments. Now, most of them have passed away. Offering my ornaments to my *bla ma* will help those who have passed away. I didn't waste my ornaments. Now, my most precious thing is this prayer wheel that my husband also cherished.

¹ See <https://bit.ly/3BmCw1q> 29 July 2022 for more on this mantra.

² Here and elsewhere I've used ?? to indicate an uncertain date.

I don't know who will keep this prayer wheel after I pass away. My mother-in-law, Sher mtsho (1901-1983), spun this prayer wheel so often that she wore out many coins. Let me now explain why there are coins on the prayer wheels. A yak horn washer is under the base of the prayer wheel. A metal coin with a hole through the center is placed on top of a metal washer above the handle's center. When rotated, the yak horn washer and the drum spin simultaneously while the coin washer does not rotate, so the coin washer wears out. The number of worn-out coins you accumulate shows how often you spin the prayer wheel. We lost many of those coins, but I still keep ten.

I believe this prayer wheel is more than 200 years old. One summer morning in the late 1950s, Myang lu and his mates were herding and found a wooden box. Hoping it would be full of treasures, they excitedly opened it. To their disappointment, the box contained only old scriptures and a prayer wheel. At that time, having religious articles or practicing religious activities was forbidden. Anyway, Myang lu surreptitiously put the prayer wheel inside his sheepskin robe and the handle inside his right sleeve. His mates ignored the wooden box since it had no treasures.

Myang lu took the prayer wheel to his home and gave it to his devout mother, who valued it. She turned this prayer wheel countless times and wore out many coins.

I didn't spin this prayer wheel very much when I was younger because I was busy with house chores, herding, taking care of children, and other daily activities. As a woman, you can imagine I had a lot of work to do. A woman is judged on how much work she does. Spending a lot of time spinning a prayer wheel is not what a good young woman should do.

I restored the prayer wheel last year [2021]. My brother (Phur ba, b. 1954) recommended a local metalsmith who made a new copper cover (top: *gnam 'khor lo rtse dgu*, bottom: *sa pad+ma 'dab brgyad*). The original prayer wheel had a red leather cover. The handle is the same. The smith also made silver *sked thag* 'bands' for the center of the prayer wheel. The charge for such a new prayer wheel cover was ~2,600 RMB. However, because of the good relationship between Phur ba and the metal smith, I paid 1,300 RMB.

The '*khor rdo* consists of a small copper piece, ten worn coins, and an artificial turquoise I bought in Lha sa in 2020.

Phyogs las nam rgyal opened my prayer wheel and identified the scripture inside as *Thar mdo*.¹

Ri yongs dga' ldan was sent by Dga' ldan Monastery to our community in the 1950s from Lha sa. He was well-known, sometimes gave religious teachings, and emphasized belief in Buddhism as the most important thing. It will diminish your suffering, and you will be enlightened before or after your death. We believe this prayer wheel belonged to him. Many elders who saw this prayer wheel said it was a *rag khrom 'khor lo*, a term commonly used when I was young. An old monk who visited my home when I was in my forties told me that people turn *rags khrom 'khor lo* prayer wheels during the day and 'dre 'ghosts' turn them at night.

I don't know how much it would bring if I sold it. Nobody has asked to buy it, and I've never said I would sell it or give it away. Continuing to turn this prayer wheel protects against *gdon bgegs* 'evil spirits'. I want to keep this prayer wheel with me forever. As I mentioned, I had other valuable ornaments, but those ornaments are nothing compared to this prayer wheel. I now have no interest in ornaments. This prayer wheel is everything to me. I feel peaceful when I turn it. I worried that I would lose or damage the ornaments I once wore. They brought nothing good, only worry. That is one reason I offered them to my *bla ma*. When I die, the Lord of Death won't value my ornaments.

PART TWO: *SENG GDONG SRUNG BZLOG 'KHOR LO*

Part Two describes Don skyid's family's *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* 'prayer wheel' and how her family got it. It also explains when and how they spin the 'khor lo.

¹ See <https://bit.ly/3vncTtH> 28 July 2022 for examples of *Thar mdo*.

FIG 8a. Don skyid's family's *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* (12 February 2023, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



FIG 8b. The *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* (6) is comprised of multiple circular papers of *seng gdong gzungs sngags* 'magic sentences of *seng gdong*'¹ within four bamboo crosses (4), never leaves Don skyid's home, is kept within the black fabric bag (1) when it is not rotated, and it is stored in a lower place in the home that is not obvious. A *bshug gu* 'rope' (2) used to close the bag. The '*khor rdo*' (5) is a small circular stone in black cloth. A screwdriver handle (3) serves as the detachable handgrip.



The following account provides insight into Tibetan society's multifaceted religious and cultural practices, traditional customs, and beliefs. It underlines the crucial role of local deities and tangible symbols in seeking assistance and safeguarding oneself. The

¹ I was uncertain about the contents of the paper inside the '*khor lo*', a cylindrical container. Instead of opening it to see what was inside, I sought advice from Phyogs las rnam rgyal. He suggested that such '*khor lo*' typically contain layers of circular papers with magic phrases of *seng gdong ma* 'lion-headed one'. For more information about magic sentences, see <https://bit.ly/43M7lIK> and <https://bit.ly/3IYBpb7> 7 June 2023. However, Phyogs las rnam rgyal was unsure of the specific contents. It is worth noting that Chos lo crafted the '*khor lo*' and Don skyid and other family members have limited knowledge about it.

significance of incense offerings as a cultural practice and the potential repercussions of disregarding this tradition are highlighted. The account also sheds light on the influential role of *gto bla* and *bla ma* in guiding and providing divination to local people.

My family lost a lot of livestock in 2002 and 2003. Thieves stole many yaks, and wolves killed many sheep. We were worried, so my husband got this '*khor lo* from a *gto bla*.¹ It is a *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo*. The *gto bla* suggested my husband make this *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* and spin it counterclockwise. He emphasized this *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* should never be higher than your knees. We didn't find it helpful, so Phyogs las rnam rgyal visited Phyag 'tshal a lags (b. 1971) and asked him for a *pra pa* 'mirror divination'.² Phyag 'tshal a lags told him our family was not offering incense to a deity with physical embodiments that represent the deity. For example, one of these physical embodiments is a black horse with gray lips, groin, eye edges, and armpits, known as a *rta bra bra* 'gray horse'.³ Another physical embodiment is a dark lance with a black banner called *mdung dar smug po can* 'purple lance carrier'. These physical embodiments symbolize and honor the tribe deity tangibly. Phyag 'tshal a lags refers to my natal home deity, Lcam gyi bra bo, with features Phyag 'tshal a lags described.

As mentioned, the deity venerated in my natal home, Lcam gyi bra bo, is considered a non-Buddhistic deity, as are all the deities in my home community. These deities have the power to assist us in our current life but are incapable of

¹ A *bla ma* who performs rituals to avert misfortune.

² According to Phyogs las rnam rgyal, the mirror divination Bstan pa'i dbang phyug does is actually *yid bra* 'mind divination' because he doesn't use a mirror. Instead, he uses his mind to determine *la nye* 'signs'. Some 'mirror divination' diviners rely on mirrors to see signs by tossing rice on mirrors and looking for signs on the mirrors. People who have pika eyes easily see the signs on the mirror, though they may not be diviners, thanks to their naturally gifted pika eyes. They may see *sha za* 'flesh-eating demons' and *lha mthong 'dre mthong* 'gods and demons'. A mirror diviner who lacks pika eyes may invite a man with pika eyes to look at the mirror and describe what he sees. (I never heard of a mirror divination diviner inviting a woman with pika eyes).

³ Translating the name of the horse into English is not straightforward as it is a common colloquial name used for that type of horse. I am uncertain about the accuracy of the translation.

helping us achieve a better next life. For instance, if we wish to win a horse race, we may offer incense to the deity in the hopes of receiving their aid. Consequently, we do not offer prostrations to the deities as we would *bla ma*, monks, and Buddhas, as these figures have the power to aid us in our current and future lives.

If a family miss offering incense to a deity, it may be considered a lapse in showing proper reverence to the deity. For example, I married and moved to my husband's home place. If my husband's family doesn't offer incense to my natal home deity, misfortune may come to my husband's family, such as livestock stolen by thieves or predation by wolves.

Everything steadily improved once we began offering incense to Lcam gyi bra bo annually.

Lcam gyi bra bo is a local deity of the A bzod Tribe. He has a female deity partner, Lcam gyi bra mo. Each deity has its mountain. A bzod people go there annually to offer incense around the tenth day of the fourth month. If you compare these two mountain deities, the male deity has more people offering incense and respect than the female deity. Locals believe that the male deity is the main deity, so many people don't offer incense to the female deity.

My family lives far from my natal A bzod Tribe, so it is not always convenient for us to make an annual trip to offer incense to the deity. However, we still do so because we believe that neglecting this practice may lead to misfortunes befalling our family again.

A khu bkra phun (1946-2020), a *bla ma* from A bzod Monastery,¹ told me, "If your family finds it inconvenient to make an annual trip to offer incense to the deity, there is an alternative approach. It involves taking stones from the deity's offering incense platform and using them to perform the incense offering ritual at your home."

We continue offering my natal home, A bzod Tribe deity incense annually. My sons take turns going every year. While we don't doubt what A khu bkra phun suggested, we are apprehensive about misfortune befalling our family if we don't visit.

In addition, there is a revered deity known as Spen ma'i g.yu rgyal phyug mo in my husband's home in Spen ma Valley, Khang sar Tribe. This deity is highly regarded, and offering incense is necessary to avoid misfortune. Furthermore, locals are careful not to engage in any behavior that may offend the deity, such as laughing while offering incense on the mountain of Spen ma'i g.yu rgyal phyug mo

¹ For more, see <https://bit.ly/3K1ERmi> 20 February 2023.

or killing animals, particularly wolves, as they are believed to belong to the deity. Any mistreatment of such animals is thought to bring negative consequences.

PART THREE: CHOS MDZAD (B. 1938) AND YI PO (B. 1941) AND THEIR FIVE PRAYER WHEELS

Part Three offers biographical sketches of Chos mdzad (b. 1938) and his wife, Yi po (b. 1941), and provides descriptions of their five prayer wheels: two *thar 'khor*, a *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo*, a *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*, and a *'then 'khor*.

FIG 9. Chos mdzad's right-hand grips a *thar 'khor* (1,2) while his left-hand holds a *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*, in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



This personal narrative is an intimate account of the daily routines, family life, and religious practices of a Tibetan couple named Chos mdzad and Yi po. The couple's beliefs and cultural traditions are deeply rooted in their religious practices, which are a significant part of their lives. Additionally, the narrative delves into

the couple's early life and the gradual acquisition of their five prayer wheels, including two *thar 'khor*, a *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo*, a *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*, and a *'then 'khor*, providing historical and cultural context. This account offers insight into Tibetan culture and traditions through Chos mdzad and Yi po's personal experiences.

My name is Chos mdzad. Yi po is my wife. We married when I was twenty-four, and Yi po was twenty-one. My wife came to my home with her first child, who was about one year old, and then the child suddenly died. We didn't perform a sky burial or water burial. Instead, we held *chod 'og tu 'phangs pa*¹ to protect our future children from *chung sri*² 'infant-demon' attack. We buried the baby under a bridge. It is very important to find a place located under a bridge or road that is auspicious. If not, it is *chod nag la shor ba*.³ If the ritual goes well, future children won't die. However, unfortunately, after we lost my wife's first baby, we couldn't have children. We assumed the ritual didn't go well - the bridge burial site wasn't auspicious. We then adopted Mi 'gyur (b. 1983), who later married Phyug mtsho (b. 1985). They have two children, Sher po (b. 2005), a student, and 'Jigs phun (b. 2015), a monk. We started to live in Mtha' ba Community in 2005. We are raising both children while their parents are busy herding our livestock.

My feet started to become uncomfortable when I was in my fifties and gradually became very painful. In 2019, I was affected by gout. I consulted Chinese and Tibetan doctors, but they couldn't cure my gout completely. I rarely circumambulate or do prostrations because of my poor knees and feet. I stay home most of the time, spin my prayer wheels, and chant scriptures and mantras. My wife's feet and knees are in good shape compared to mine. She circumambulates and prostrates. I admire her. She also cooks for us and does the dishes when Sher po attends the local Tibetan Middle School where she must board. Sher po spends her vacations with us and helps us cook, wash dishes, and do house chores. She is quite handy. We appreciate her. 'Jigs phun is young, and we don't expect him to help us cook and do house chores.

¹ This is a local ritual. If the first child dies, the family may worry that they have become a *chung sri* and hold the ritual in the hopes of preventing the misfortune of future children dying.

² For more on *chung sri*, see <https://bit.ly/3tosF5U> and <https://bit.ly/3zU2Qio> 12 November 2022.

³ A characteristic of *chod nag la shor ba* is that if the ritual *'chod 'og tu 'phangs pa* is done in a wrong place, it cuts off the *skye rgyud* 'family line'.

FIG 10. *Thar 'khor* (1,2) in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



I found this *thar 'khor* in the river in Lung ring 'Long Valley' in 1959 in early winter when the river was ice-covered. I was twenty-one. When I found it, it was without '*khor rdo*, '*khor yo*, and *tog*. I took it home and dried it.

We were not allowed to spin prayer wheels and publicly engage in religious activities for years. Blo brtan "Rgya rag," a monk, helped me change the original leather *thar 'khor* cover for a new leather cover. He herded horses for Sgo mang Monastery. Although he was a monk, he didn't wear a monastic robe. He wore a yellow Tibetan robe. Hwar ba a lags' ¹ (b. 1948)

teacher was important to my family and our neighbor families. At that time, if we needed to chant something, finding a monk or a *bla ma* who would chant was very difficult. They were not allowed to do such a thing. However, we secretly asked him to chant. Whenever he agreed to chant, those responsible had to promise they wouldn't tell anybody.

As I mentioned, when I first found the *thar 'khor*, it didn't have a '*khor lo 'i yu ba* 'handle' so I made a juniper handle and a *tog* of silver. My mother (1913-??) found a silver '*khor rdo* before I found my *thar 'khor*. When she went to Smin thang to grind barley, she found this silver '*khor rdo* in a piece of felt. She was unsure what it was when she first saw it on the ground, but picking it up, she immediately knew it was a silver '*khor rdo*, which I then used. A piece of small bamboo is under my *thar 'khor*. Earlier, it was a *mdzo* horn. I had a riding *mdzo* with a nose ring that I rode when I herded livestock. After it died, I used its horn as a '*khor lte*.³

Later, Kho lo (Khya bza') told us that *thar 'khor* was her family's, emphasizing it belonged to Dkar dbang's mother. I don't know how leader Dkar

¹ For more on Hwar ba a lags, see <https://bit.ly/3fFZdFo> 12 November 2022.

² <https://bit.ly/3UmXCmM> November 2022.

³ <https://bit.ly/3zMZ4qG> 7 November 2022.

dbang's family got this *thar 'khor*.

Unlike today, prayer wheels were quite rare at that time.

We lost the silver *tog* the day we moved from the summer pasture to the winter pasture by pack yaks. I thought we might have lost it in our *mtsher shul* 'remains of a seasonal dwelling site', so I returned to search for it. We never found it, so I used another prayer wheel's *tog*.

My mother wore out twenty coins in spinning my *thar 'khor*. You can see some of the worn-out coins with the *'khor rdo*.

The cover of this prayer wheel is original. We didn't change it.

As you can see, another prayer wheel is on top of my *thar 'khor*. It is also a *thar 'khor*(2). A Bsu ba Monastery¹ monk gave it to me. My duty was herding my family's sheep, and occasionally, I needed to kill one or two a year for meat. When the monk gave me this *thar 'khor*, he said, "You kill a lot of livestock. That is a sin. Please spin this *thar 'khor* to reduce your sin."

When the monk gave me this *thar 'khor*, it had *'khor yo*, *'khor rdo*, and everything a prayer wheel needs to have. Carrying two prayer wheels while herding was inconvenient, so I used only one *'khor yo*.

The top of the *thar 'khor* the monk gave has a cloth covering. My wife and I planned to change it to a leather one, but our eyesight is not very good now so we couldn't make a leather cover.

FIG 11. Parts of the *thar 'khor* (1, 2):

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>sked thag</i> 'band' | 2. <i>'khor rdo</i> 'prayer wheel stone' |
| 3. <i>dong tse</i> 'coins' | 4. <i>'khor lte</i> 'rotating sleeve' |
| 5. <i>dung dkar</i> 'seashell' | 6. <i>'khor lo'i yu ba</i> 'handle' |
| 7. <i>thar 'khor</i> (2) | 8. <i>tog</i> 'top' |

¹ <https://bit.ly/3DKMRE5> 7 November 2022.



Our second prayer wheel is a *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo* (3), which I found when I was twenty-nine. Rnam grol gave me a red leather cover for it. Rnam grol was Bde sgrol's brother, who passed away long ago. Rnam grol got it from a D+hlHphu Monastery¹ *bla ma*. He didn't identify the *bla ma* who gave it to him.

Long story short, I was herding my sheep on the mountain one winter day, and as was my habit, I brought the *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo* with me. Every time I went herding, I took it and rotated it. When I noticed my sheep had scattered, I put my felt hat on the ground, put my *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo* on that, and went to drive the sheep back. I couldn't find my *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo* when I returned. Whoever found it must have thought it was funny because I had left it on a hat on the ground. That's all I have to say about my second prayer wheel, the *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo*.

FIG 12. The *ma Ni'i 'khor lo* in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).

This *ma Ni'i 'khor lo* is our third prayer wheel, which we call a silver prayer wheel because of its silver cover.

A monk, A khu bloṣ tshul, gave me a *ma Ni'i* scripture, which I put inside the silver cover. He used to be a *mkhan po*² in Rdo grub chen Monastery. Later A khu bloṣ tshul and his family moved near Rnga ba and settled because one of his brothers (Rong dpal) had a dispute in their home community. A khu bloṣ tshul's family was very poor, and the King of Rme'u³ asked Rong dpal to join an old childless couple. The King arranged such situations, asking young, healthy people to help old people who had enough resources to support themselves but were physically weak and unhealthy. The King ensured the young people were willing to help and care for them until they passed away. The young people were then allowed to own their property.

A khu bloṣ tshul was in his fifties when I met him. He had many old religious

¹ <https://bit.ly/3DK6b5K> 22 September 2022.

² <https://bit.ly/3WzVXMn> 4 November 2022.

³ <https://bit.ly/3U6DaXd> 4 November 2022.

items, such as small stupas, *rdo rje*,¹ and other items. I don't know what happened to them. Maybe A khu blo² tshul offered them to monasteries.

A khu blo² tshul used to go to every Khang sar Community household and chant scriptures. He helped our community a lot by chanting for families who needed it. For example, if someone passed away, he secretly went to that family and chanted. Chanting was illegal then, and everyone was aware of the consequences.

A khu blo² tshul was a diviner and a *rtsis pa*² 'soothsayer'. I don't know if there is a current reincarnation. His family might know that.

A tall monk helped to make the silver cover of my *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*. We went to Rnga ba, where a metalsmith, Ri lo, in Dbon pa Village, made the silver cover for our *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*.

FIG 13. *Ma Ni'i 'khor lo* parts in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs):

1. '*khor lte* 'rotating sleeve'
2. *sked thag* 'band'
3. '*khor rdo* 'prayer wheel stone'
4. *dong tse* 'coins'
5. *tog* 'top'
6. '*khor lo'i yu ba* 'handle'



FIG 14. The '*then 'khor* 'pulled prayer wheel' (5) in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).

¹ <https://bit.ly/3zHLm8j> 4 November 2022.

² <https://bit.ly/3WsMsi2> 4 November 2022.



This *'then 'khor* is our fourth prayer wheel. It doesn't have a *'khor rdo*. It has a rope under the actual prayer wheel that we pull to spin it. This *bka' 'gyur 'khor lo*¹ and Sher po are the same age. In 2004, Stag lung dgon bought many prayer wheels for the monastery (not to sell). My wife and I wanted one and asked Thub chos, my nephew, to help us. We assured we would pay for it. He agreed to help. We didn't pay cash. My wife, Yi po, went to our herding place during summer to help Mi 'gyur and Phyug mtsho. Meanwhile, she

collected three kilograms of dried fritillary, sold it, and paid for the *'then 'khor*.

Nowadays, people have many prayer wheels and don't worry about not affording them. Prayer wheels are everywhere. It's not like when I was young when getting a prayer wheel was not easy. Now you just need passion for spinning prayer wheels. I have gout and can't walk very far. I am becoming bedridden. My wife is my primary assistant. Gout doesn't allow me to go outside our yard, but it is OK in a way because I can do daily religious recitations and spin our several prayer wheels.

I am eighty-four, which is a perfect time to die. I'm still not completely disabled. I will not cause my wife and family more trouble if I die now. Eighty-four years is a long time.

¹ <https://bit.ly/3Ui4JwM> 4 November 2022.

FIG 15. Parts of the 'then 'khor in Chos mdzad and Yi po's home near Stag lung Monastery (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs):

1. *srog shing* 'main beam'
2. *steng lte* 'top rotating sleeve'
3. *gdugs* 'top parasol'
4. *phur ma* 'a folded silk'
5. 'khor thag 'belt'
6. 'then lung 'pull rope'
7. 'og lte 'bottom rotating sleeve'



PART FOUR: BDE SGROL'S (B. 1947) *YIG BRGYA'T 'KHOR LO*

Part Four describes the life of Bde sgrol (b. 1947, also known as Zha ye), and her *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*, its history, and its value to her, providing insights into traditional Tibetan nomadic life and customs. The narrative describes cultural and historical details, including the various tribes, the livestock they raised, and the challenges they faced.

It offers a glimpse into the life of a woman who lived through different periods of Tibetan history and saw the introduction of new ways of life. Zha ye's life story reflects how Tibetan nomads' traditional way of life has changed over time and how modernization has impacted traditional cultural practices.

The account highlights the importance of family, community, and spirituality in traditional Tibetan culture.

My name is Zha ye, which means 'baby'. It is my real name, but people stopped calling me that after I moved to Mtha' ba Community in 2006. They called me Bde sgrol. I don't know who gave me that name. In 2009, I went to Tshul khriims bzang po and became a *dge bsnyen ma* 'lay female votary of Buddha'. He gave me a new name - Byang chub sgrol ma - because I took *dge bsnyen*¹ vows. I like that name and hoped I would be called that, but people continued to call me Bde sgrol.

My father, Chos lo, and mother, Khug skyid, passed away in their eighties. They had twelve children. I was the youngest. I married Dkon bsam (1953~2005) when I was nineteen. We had eight children. Three died when they were infants. The others are Rig pe (b. 1967), Bde mo (b. 1971), Tshe dbang mtsho (b. 1974), Lha mtsho (b. 1977), and Skal pe (b. 1985).

I herded yaks, sheep, and horses. I am thankful for my livestock. My family would have died in the famine without them.

My husband and I herded 1,000 sheep and one hundred horses for the gongshe 'commune' in Gsa' khog Valley for about eighteen years. We married in Gsa' khog while we were herding there. Dkon bsam's family was very poor. We only had three female yaks. We had enough food and clothes to wear, thanks to our beloved yaks. We survived.

While in Gsa' khog, my husband's parents persuaded us to come to the

¹ For more on *dge bsnyen*, see <https://bit.ly/3IXPyWJ> 23 February 2023.

Gsa' skor Tribe and live near them. So, one day we went to the Gsa' skor Tribe. Unfortunately, the Gsa' skor Tribe leader rejected us. We didn't know why. Maybe it was because we married outside of the tribe. We then moved to the neighboring Dug bza' Tribe. I regretted leaving Gsa' skor after so many years there. I love the Gsa' khog mountains, grasslands, and life there. I fondly remember them.

Gsa' khog and Dbal ban border each other. In Gsa' khog, Dkon bsam went to Dbal ban and bought a *mdzo stag stag dung rked can*¹ from Nyal kho, a monk. We gave Nyal kho a female yak and a sheep for it. I liked that *mdzo* a lot. The first time we brought the *mdzo* to our pasture, big strong male yaks bullied him, especially at night when we drove all the yaks into the yak enclosure. So, I tied him inside our yak hair tent to protect him from the other yaks. Gradually, the yaks adopted him as one of their members. He had offspring.² I never considered selling him or his offspring. Now, I live in Mtha' ba Community, where I'm not much involved in herding. My daughter, Rig pe, and her husband care for everything related to herding. Unlike me, they are not fond of *mdzo*. Now we have a few old *mdzo*. When I was young, we considered the number of livestock and cared about their color and beauty. If a family had one or two beautiful *mdzo*, we admired that family and hoped our females would have their offspring.

Today is different, with people herding yaks for cash. When I was young, we herded livestock for food, clothing, and housing. We milked yaks in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Children were busy chasing calves to keep them separate from their mothers. We were afraid the calves would nurse their mothers, leaving no milk. Milk is everything when you think of our food - butter, cheese, and milk tea. In terms of clothing, we made leather shoes, sheepskin robes, lambskin robes, and felt for raincoats. Even our housing is related to livestock. Yak hair tents are made of yak hair. Oh, I nearly forgot, we got meat from the livestock we slaughtered or other predators such as wolves killed or that died from natural causes. In contrast, now people sell yaks and buy things. Making things by themselves is not something people do today.

FIG 16. Bde sgrol holds a *yig brgya'i 'khor lo* in her right hand at Don skyid's home near Stag lung Monastery (2023, 'Jam dbyangs

¹ A *mdzo* is the male offspring of a yak mother and bull (cattle). *Stag stag dung rked can* may be translated as 'tiger-colored with a big white spot on the belly'.

² *Mdzo* are generally thought to be sterile, however, Zha ye reported this *mdzo* had offspring.

skyabs).



Dus po was my husband's pious aunt. Her husband was Ban so, from Smin thang. They had no children. Dus po was the commune cook when my husband and I herded livestock in Gsa' khog. Dus po and her husband stayed in Smin thang, but Dus po decided to leave her husband and return to her natal home in Khang sar several years before she passed away.

Dus po was fond of visiting our home and once spent the night at our home and the next day returned to her home. She forgot to take the *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*, so we kept it. This was several years before she passed away. I don't know how she got the *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*. Dkon bsam said the prayer wheel was a *yig brgya'i*

'*khor lo*. I didn't open it to check. I believed Dkon bsam.

To continue my story about the *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*. One morning in 2017, I ate a simple breakfast. My neighbor's family was holding a funeral and relatives and friends of the family and neighbors had come to help the family. I am old, and there was nothing I could help with, so I grabbed my prayer beads, chanted *ma Ni*, and circumambulated.

I felt a bit hungry at noon and returned home. When I got near, I saw smoke above my house. My house was on fire! Luckily the fire didn't destroy my house completely. My neighbor's family had noticed the fire and extinguished it.

I learned that my cat started the fire by turning over a butter lamp before the Buddha images. Another prayer wheel, a *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*, my bed, and my window frames were also burned. I put my *ma Ni'i 'khor lo* on top of a *rde'u 'bum* 'a mound of pebbles'.

The fire also burnt the handle of the *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*, the '*khor rdo*, and parts of the '*khor lo*. When Don bkra, the husband of my daughter, Lha mtsho, visited me, he noticed my burnt *yig brgya'i 'khor lo*, offered to fix it, took it to the herding place, and several weeks later he returned it. He is skilled at sewing and making things. He made a handle using the radius bone of his family's recently dead mare. The top and bottom of the handle are decorated with silver. That mare was important to his family because most of their horses are her offspring. My son-in-law told me that the mare died painfully, unable to eat or drink because she was old.

FIG 17. 'Jam dbyangs skyabs holds Bde sgrol's *yig brgya'i 'khor lo* in Don skyid's home near Stag lung Monastery (2023, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



PART FIVE: RELIGIOUS ITEMS DON SKYID WEARS AROUND HER NECK

Part Five features religious items Don skyid wears around her neck. The background and meaning are described for each item. These items include *sgar gyi phreng ba*, *bcu tshad*, *btags grol*, *srung 'khor*, *nag po dgu sbyor*, and *bye lcags*. Don skyid's shares her personal experiences with religion and its role in her life, including practices and beliefs. She describes in detail the meaning and significance of the religious items she wears and includes how a monk helped her granddaughter recover from an illness.

Don skyid is not alone in her religious practices. Others in her community share similar beliefs and engage in comparable rituals. Her faith is a personal matter deeply intertwined with her family and community. Her story provides insight into how religion can play a meaningful role in people's lives and unites communities.

FIG 18. Items Don skyid wears: (1) *sgar gyi phreng ba*, (2) *bcu tshad*, (3) *btags grol*,¹ (4) *srung 'khor*, (5) *nag po dgu sbyor*, and (6) *bye lcags*² (2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



¹ <https://bit.ly/3PHBWPX> 29 July 2022.

² Don skyid used this term that literally translates as 'ten-million metal'. When chanting scripture or mantra, such as *ma Ni*, ten-million times, the chanter should count one bead from their prayer beads, indicating they have chanted *ma Ni* ten-million times.

- (1) *Sgar gyi phreng ba*. I chanted *oM a mi de wa hrIH*¹ 10,000 times, so I qualified to receive this for free from Bla rung sgar Monastery. Hair from Chos rje yid bzhin nor bu is in the beads.
- (2) *Bcu tshad*. When I chant, I use these two *bcu tshad* to count the number of times I chant. Each *bcu tshad* has ten beads, so if I chant *ma Ni* a hundred times, I count this by separating one bead from the other nine beads. Counting ten beads means I have chanted *ma Ni* 1,000 times, and I then count one bead from the other *bcu tshad*. One bead from one of the *bcu tshad* represents a hundred, and one bead from the other *bcu tshad* represents a thousand.
- (3) *Btags gro* 'liberation by wearing'. A khu stag lha (1945-2018) gave it to me fifteen years ago. When I asked my husband if he wanted it, he said, "No, you keep it. A khu stag lha gave it to you." After a few years, the string broke, and I couldn't identify the top and bottom, so I asked my oldest monk son to open it because there were Tibetan letters inside, and some *srung 'khor* 'amulets' have Buddha images. He then told me which end was the top, so I made the new cover you see in the photo. The *btags gro* is very important to me because A khu stag lha gave it to me, and he was important to me.

One time, he saved the life of G.yang res, my granddaughter:

G.yang res (b. 1990) was suddenly very sick, so her mother, Rtse pe (b. 1965), and I rode our horses to see A khu stag lha in the afternoon. It wasn't easy to go to the local hospital and consult doctors there because we couldn't communicate with them well [we couldn't speak Chinese], and if you wanted or needed to go to the local hospital, you had to have a good connection. We also didn't have much money and couldn't afford medicine. We were very worried about G.yang res. She couldn't open her eyes. A khu stag lha was a doctor and a *bla ma*. When we approached his place, he was coming out of his house, seemingly leaving. I knew him well. He was from my natal home [Sog ru], so I pleaded, "You must save my granddaughter."

He looked at my granddaughter and said, "I know you are very worried about her. She looks very sick, so I am afraid I cannot help you."

But then we went into his house, and he told his assistant to give my granddaughter a *ril bu* 'pill', which we put in her mouth as A khu stag lha

¹ *oM* 'I invoke the universal sound', *a mi* 'limitless light', *de wa*, 'Buddha nature', and *hrIH* 'with self-respect'. See <https://bit.ly/3S5hZ7z> 29 July 2022 for more.

chanted *gcod* 'cut off'.¹ When he finished chanting, he said, "Yes, we did it. I promise she'll be fine. Now you can go home. Maybe it's also good if you see a doctor and she gets an IV."

After the chanting, G.yang res looked better. We thanked him and left. She didn't get an IV because I thought an IV was unnecessary. Instead, we went directly to visit Phyogs las nam rgyal, who had a small room in the monastery. We spent the night there.

The next day, we rode back to our pasture. When we arrived, my husband told me that our dog, Ser lo 'Yellow', had died the previous night. I asked, "What happened? How did Ser lo die?"

This morning, I was going to feed him. Snow was on the ground, and I could tell Ser lo was in his kennel because there were no footprints. I called him several times, but he didn't come out, so I went to the kennel and found he was dead. He didn't even move. His mouth was under his tail.

My husband traded a sheep for Ser lo with a relative in Rnga ba. Ser lo was aggressive, and we didn't like him. Before the birth of G.yang res, my oldest son and his wife had a son who had died five days after his birth. The child was my oldest son's first child, and we worried. So, we invited Khya dge a legs to our home and asked him to divine the cause of the child's death. He divined and said Ser lo was a *gdon* 'malevolent influence,' but he also emphasized that we should not get rid of Ser lo because that might bring more bad fortune. So, we did religious rituals to prevent misfortune.

I believe G.yang res got sick because of Ser lo. A khu stag lha chanted *Gcod*, and that exorcised the malevolent influence. Therefore, no other of my oldest son's children got seriously ill.

(4) *Srung 'khor*. I don't know what's inside this amulet, so I don't know what kind of amulet it is. Anyway, my relatives from Sog ru once visited, gave it to me, saying, "Many people in our home place have this amulet." They got it from Bla rung sgar Monastery.

¹ For more on *gcod* 'Tibetan Buddhist rite', see <https://bit.ly/3S9vMtA> 29 July 2022.

- (5) *Nag po dgu sbyor*. I got this Tibetan pill, a *nag po dgu sbyor* 'black-9',¹ from Stag lung Monastery, which gave a black-9 to every person in each local community to prevent COVID. I heard people say that old people, pregnant women, and infants should not always wear it because of its side effects. The proper way is to smell it a few times a day. However, I always take it with me because I sometimes forget to smell it.
- (6) *Bye lcags* 'ten-million-metal'. I never use this. I have it with my prayer beads. For example, if I chant *ma Ni* ten million times, I should count one bead from my prayer beads and use *bye lcags* as a marker. To be honest, I haven't chanted that number.

Don skyid wears other items she could not provide background for, e.g., a round medallion featuring the bust of a religious person (whose name/title she could not remember), a red bead, and *mdud pa* 'protection cords'.

PART SIX: DON SKYID'S FAMLIY'S YAK HAIR TENTS (*SBRA LEB* AND *NAG TSHANG*)² AND HOUSES

Part Six describes the yak hair tents that Don skyid's family once used, including a *sbra leb* and *nag tshang*. She also gives a brief history of her family's houses. This account sheds light on the significance of self-sufficiency and the traditional lifestyle in the region. It narrates how a family inherited their tents, a *sbra leb*, and a *nag tshang*, and how these items were passed down from generation to generation, which is particularly intriguing. Moreover, the account showcases various types of yak hair tents, each with its purpose and design, emphasizing their constant renewal and maintenance requirements, demonstrating the resourcefulness and adaptability of those who relied on these tents.

The narrator also mentions an uncomplicated exchange system between locals and those from Rnga ba, enabling the family to prosper without the conveniences of modern life. Overall, the

¹ For more on *nag po dgu sbyor*, see <https://bit.ly/3zkebXc> 29 July 2022.

² The *sbra leb* 'flat tent' and *nag tshang* 'black housing' are both used by a family and differ in size, with the former larger than the latter.

account offers a glimpse into a lifestyle very different from contemporary living. It portrays how the narrator's community depended on their herds and traditional knowledge to survive and how the yak hair tent played a crucial role in their existence.

Sbra leb and Nag tshang

My family is fortunate to own two types of yak hair tents: a *sbra leb* and a *nag tshang*. These are just two examples of the many types of yak hair tents, including the *nyal sbra* 'sleeping tent' often pitched near the main tent or sheep enclosure, the *klad nag* 'black top' which, because it is predominantly canvas, some argue it is not a true yak hair tent, and the *lug ba'i sbra* 'shepherd tent' which is easy to assemble and used for short-term sheep grazing.

Another is the *tshogs sbra* 'assembly tent' used specifically for Buddhist services. Growing up in the Khang sar and Sog ru tribes, I recall each tribe had its own monastery tent that followed the tribe wherever they went. As a woman who primarily stayed at home, my knowledge of the various types of yak hair tents is limited. I humbly acknowledge I do not know if you ask me how many different types of yak hair tents Tibetans typically use.

During my youth, it was not just women who stayed at home but men as well. We were occupied with herding livestock, making such clothing as sheepskin robes and leather boots, and renewing our yak hair tents. These tents were unlike the canvas ones that can be easily purchased in markets today for 700 to 2,000 RMB and then replaced a few years later. I am not exaggerating when I say that money was not highly valued in our society in the past. We were self-sufficient and, aside from barley, needed little from the outside world. Since we were nomads, we did not cultivate vegetables, relying on our herds and dairy products.

Barley was a staple of our diet. On certain occasions, such as during the New Year or when a family member passed away, we invited monks and *bla ma* to chant *zhe dgu* (a forty-nine-day ritual performed after a person's death) or *shi tshigs* (a yearly ritual performed after a person's death). During these rituals, we offered *phye* 'wheat flour', *bye ma ka ra* 'granulated sugar', and salt. The head of the family (a man unless there were no adult men) would go to Rnga ba, where grains, vegetables, and fruits were cultivated to purchase these items. People from Rnga ba sometimes came to our place to exchange barley, apples, and potatoes for butter, cheese, yak skins, and sheepskins. The exchange between local people here and the Rnga ba people was a simple, efficient system that

allowed us to thrive without the luxuries of the modern world.

As a youth, I recall even men didn't have many opportunities to leave home. We were busy with what I've mentioned. Unlike modern white tents readily available for purchase, our tents required frequent maintenance and renewal.

Now, I want to tell you a story that illustrates how yak hair tents did not remain the same. They were constantly changing:

Many years ago, a son and his mother lived together. One time they quarreled. The mother was so angry she said to her son, "Unreliable. Don't live with me anymore. Leave my yak hair tent! Never come back! I don't have such a bad son like you!"

The son responded, "Your original tent is gone. I have frequently helped repair this tent. It's also partly mine."

The son was right. A yak hair tent never remained the same, even for one year. Every year people do *sbra gso*.¹

FIG 19. Don skyid's family's yak hair tent (9 August 2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



¹ *Sbra gso* 'bringing up a tent'. Once a year, old cloth is removed from the edge near the ground and new cloth is added to the edge of the yak hair tent top.

My family's *sbra leb* was used for at least four generations. My husband's father's father originally owned it. At that time, people said, "*Bu rgyus sbra ring tshang gi sbra red rgya shar ba 'bab sa red.*"¹

Dme sman or Sman lha² married Dme shul bza' shar ba, whose family was wealthy. When she married Sman lha, her family gave them this tent. They had four children, Bde skyid, Blo ldan, 'Be tho, and Tho skyid. Sman lha and his wife, Dme shul bza' shar ba, gave the *sbra leb* to 'Be tho, who married Khra bza' sher mtsho. My husband's parents gave us the *sbra leb*. That was how we came to own it. It now belongs to my oldest son, Tshe brtan.

My eleven children were all born in our *sbra leb*. My family lived in a yak hair tent until 1989, the year of the tenth PaN chen rin po che's death. I remember that. It was the year my family had our first adobe house in Mtha' ba Community near Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling. Many of our friends and relatives from Rnga ba helped us build that house. They were good at tamping adobe walls and building houses. Building an adobe house requires a lot of wood. In autumn, we sell livestock. So, my oldest son Tshe brtan went to the local County Town to sell some livestock. He took the money and went to Rnga ba and bought a big Dongfeng truck of wood for about 3,000 RMB, which was a lot at that time. A neighbor had wood boards, and we had timbers. We exchanged some with each other. I made a mud hearth in our first adobe house.

FIG 20. Don skyid's family's *sbra leb*, two large leather sacks, and four sacks in Don skyid's home in Mtha' ba Community. The man is Tshe brtan (9 August 2022, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).

1. My family's *sbra leb* is folded and fastened with *rtsid thag* 'yak hair rope'. Nowadays, we keep our *sbra leb* stored. We don't pitch it anymore. However, my children and I share great memories of living in the *sbra leb*. The time we spent in the *sbra leb* was not perfect. For example, we worried about leaks and other issues when it rained. Nevertheless, I have never forgotten that my husband and I raised our children in our *sbra leb*. It was our home.

2. My husband and I made those two big leather sacks. Nowadays, various types of sacks are available, and people don't use leather sacks anymore.

¹ This might be explained in this way: Bu rgyus' (a person/family) long yak hair tent where Western Chinese (soldiers and merchants) stayed. "West" refers to such places as Zi ling (Xining).

² He was called these two names interchangeably.

3. We bought four white sacks for my oldest son's third daughter's wedding in 2022.



Later, our first adobe house walls disintegrated, so we built another house in 2009 in the same place. That's where I live now.

My family also built a house in Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling in 2002 for my two monk sons. That was the most expensive house my family built. We bought juniper timber from Pad+ma County. Juniper is more expensive than other timber. We built a house in Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling and another in the Mtha' ba Community. Every year our local monastery holds a *dbyar gnas*¹ 'summer retreat'. This is a time women are not allowed to enter the monastery and monks are not allowed to leave the monastery, so it is important to have two houses - one in the monastery and another in Mtha' ba Community.

PART SEVEN: TSHE BRTAN'S ORNAMENTS

Part Seven concerns Tshe brtan's life and the background of his inherited precious *mchong* 'agate' that he wears around his neck. Readers are given a glimpse into the life of Tshe brtan, a man from Gcig sgril County who has taken over as the head of his family after his father's death. The section illustrates his strong sense of responsibility towards his large family and his concerns regarding

¹ For more, see <https://bit.ly/3YPDBaT> 20 February 2023.

their well-being, health, and overall quality of life. We learn of Tshe brtan's relationship with his father, who taught him self-reliance and fortitude, and bequeathed to him the family's cherished *mchong*, which Tshe brtan reveres as a symbol of prosperity and good fortune.

This account offers insight into the importance of family and tradition in Tshe brtan's life as he faces various challenges, such as the loss of his first son and worries about the future of his sisters and daughters. Nevertheless, he remains devoted to his role as the head of the family and preserving his family's heritage. The significance of material possessions, such as the *mchong*, as markers of cultural identity and family history are emphasized. Through Tshe brtan's experiences, readers are invited to reflect on the role of family, tradition, and material objects in their lives and the values they hold in high esteem:

My name is Tshe brtan. My parents are Don skyid and Bsod dar. I am the oldest of my three sisters and four brothers. I am married to Rtse pe (b. 1965). We have three daughters, G.yang res, Dpal Idan skyid (b. 1994) G.yang phyug (b. 1995), and one son, Ye shes bzang po, b. 1996). Our first child passed away several days after his birth.

We sent Ye shes bzang po to Stag lung Monastery to become a monk when he was six. We believed this was a good choice for him and might protect his life because we lost our first son when he was very young.

After my father passed away, I became responsible for my mother, my two monk brothers, and my youngest brother, as well as my wife, my monk son, and my three daughters (one is divorced and has two sons, and another has a son with her current husband). Given the enormity of my role, I do not gamble or drink. While I have never explicitly promised to abstain from these activities, I recognize that they are detrimental to me and the well-being of my family.

I began herding sheep alone when I was sixteen. Although my father initially accompanied me at our *lug ba* 'sheep herding camp', he would eventually leave for our *zog ba* 'yak herding camp' where my parents tended our yaks and horses. Sometimes Father stayed with me for a day or two before leaving.

I relied solely on my feet to navigate the terrain while herding because I had no horse or yak to ride. Without a calendar, clock, or watch, I relied on the sun's position to determine the time to drive the sheep back to their enclosure. It

was tough, but I thank Father, who taught me self-sufficiency and resilience.

As time passed, my siblings grew older and were able to help herd the sheep while my parents continued to focus on the yaks and horses.

I'm very concerned about my sisters and daughters. I worry about each of them and the kind of man they will end up with. We can no longer arrange marriages as we did in the old days. There are many irresponsible men, at least in Gcig sgril County. They marry someone today and leave them tomorrow. I can accept it if my sisters or daughters marry poor men if they are responsible and kind.

Unfortunately, some of my daughters and sisters have had negative experiences in their marriages, which they certainly did not deserve. I hope that they gained valuable lessons from these experiences.

As family head, my concerns include maintaining a good quality of life and access to suitable grazing land. Additionally, I am anxious about the possibility of any family members falling ill and requiring medical treatment. Maintaining the good health of my family members is paramount.

FIG 21. Tshe brtan in his family home near Stag lung Monastery (2023, 'Jam dbyangs skyabs).



Father gave me his *mchong* after I married Rtse pe and told me:

Before your mother and I married, my family lived in the commune organized by the local government. The *sre chen* had a huge yak hair tent

where people ate together.

The local government instructed families to burn things related to religion. One night, my father, 'Be tho, and some elder men gathered and collected religious items from each family and started to burn them. In the middle of this activity, a man asked my father if our family had any important items in our *g.yang khug* 'pouch for auspicious objects' since we were an old family. My father grabbed the half-burnt *g.yang khug* and noticed a heavy item inside. He dropped it to the ground. A *mchong* was inside, which he kept as a *g.yang rten*.¹

My *mchong* is special to me. I respect it as a *g.yang rten*. When I was a child, I had a very important amulet that I lost. I regretted losing it. My parents scolded, "What a bad boy! How could you lose it?"

Father later gave me his *mchong*, which was important to him. I take good care of it because I don't want to lose it like I did my amulet.

Although the *mchong* is an ornament, it means much more to me. Father obtained it from our family's *g.yang khug*. Anything that remains within a *g.yang khug* symbolizes prosperity and good fortune.

I wore a coral necklace when I was younger but eventually gave it to my oldest daughter. People in my and older generations lose interest in ornaments.

CONCLUSION

In 2023, children who were relatives of Mtha' ba Community elders began attending school around the age of six. Material items they most valued were associated with modern technology and fashion, e.g., phones, computers, vehicles, earphones, and certain popular clothing brands. For example, government employees often competed with the clothing they wore. With salaries that would allow it, Arc'teryx² was a widely popular brand in Gcig sgril County.

¹ According to Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *g.yang rten* are certain objects with the power to channel positive energy and good fortune. When venerated, they can bring prosperity, abundance, and success to individuals or communities.

² Created in British Colombia, Canada in the late 1980s as Rock Solid Manufacturing, Arc'teryx is an outdoor wear company. In 2023, Arc'teryx was a global brand with offices in Vancouver, Tokyo, Munich, and other locations. Their clothing is used by hikers, police, and soldiers for its

Arc'teryx clothing was expensive, considered high-quality, and therefore elevated the status of those who wore it.

Only the elders in Don skyid's community consider the items described by Don skyid and others as valuable. The passing of these elders will lead to a time when very few will appreciate such items as described in this article. The younger generation in the community now places greater value on gold necklaces, gold rings, coral, and other fashionable items, to define their identity. While some may view this value shift with concern, it is part of the landscape of rapidly altering cultural norms.

Certain youth valued artifacts because they hoped they might sell them for a high price, unlike elders such as Don skyid, who never considered selling them. When I asked Don skyid, "Have you ever thought about selling your artifacts?" she replied:

No. Nobody has asked me to sell my artifacts. Many think they have little value, but they are very important to me. I feel safe when I wear them and am unhappy when I see my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren without items like those I wear. I encourage them to wear such items because they can protect them.

Don skyid and her husband believed that offering incense and spinning the *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo* had an important direct connection to their family's well-being and good fortune. In contrast, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren considered such activities unnecessary. They also had a minimum interest in and appreciation of yak hair tents.

When I spoke with Don skyid, the idea of interviewing Mtha' ba Community elders and writing about their life experiences and beliefs was sparked. I asked Don skyid, "What is the most important thing to you? Why?"

Her response was, "My *thar 'khor*."

This piqued my interest. The values of Don skyid and other elders, such as Bde sgrol, Chos mdzad, and Yi po, differ from those of younger generations who emphasize the value of money, material possessions, and contemporary knowledge production. The beliefs

of the elders, formed through direct interaction with their environment, extensive observations, and long-term experiences, are increasingly devalued and disregarded. Their grandchildren and great-grandchildren do not share the same values and beliefs. With the passing of Don skyid and other elder members, their unique culture and values will be lost. It is a privilege to have had the opportunity to speak with them and write about their experiences and beliefs. Once they are gone, finding Tibetans with first-hand knowledge of traditional Tibetan lifestyles and beliefs will be challenging.

This paper has also explored the religious and cultural practices of the Mtha' ba Community in Amdo through personal experiences and histories of local elder Tibetan religious practitioners. The paper has highlighted the significant roles that religious items and personal ornaments play in the lives of the locals and provided insights into the importance of religion and tradition in the community.

Through the stories of Don skyid, Chos mdzad, Yi po, Bde sgrol, and Tshe brtan, this paper shows how religious items and personal ornaments are not only symbols of faith but also connect individuals to their cultural heritage and history. By examining the *thar 'khor*, *seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor lo*, *sgrol ma'i 'khor lo*, *ma Ni'i 'khor lo*, *'then 'khor* and *mchong 'agate*', this paper offers a deeper understanding of the symbolism, function, and significance of these religious items.

I also want to mention Brox's "What is the Value of a Tibetan Prayer Wheel?" (2022), which explores how the value of a Tibetan prayer wheel is understood and contested by various people based on "conceptual developments in the fields of religion and of technology to develop Jens Beckert's typology of value" (2022:2). This valuable contribution to Tibetan Studies is quite different from my exploration of Tibetan prayer wheels, which showcases the importance of personal experiences and histories in understanding the significance of religious practices and objects in a specific Tibetan community, thus contributing to the literature on Tibetan religion and culture. It offers a unique perspective on the diverse and rich traditions still maintained and practiced in this region,

highlighting the importance of cultural heritage and history in shaping local identity and values.

APPENDIX: MONASTERIES, PLACE NAMES, AND PEOPLE.

Table 1. Monasteries

Name	Background
A bzod Monastery	Located in Sko chen Pastoral Community, Geig sgril County, about 110 kilometers from the county seat, it was established in 1917 by Bla ma Jia guan and Ma De. The mobile monastery was yak hair tents until 1955. In that year, a large earth-wall scripture hall and several monks' quarters were built with the support of the head of the A bzod Tribe, Chos rgyam, and a wandering incarnation <i>bla ma</i> , Rta shul 'gyur med rgya mtsho. The monastery thus expanded to 4 large and small scripture halls, around 50 monks' quarters, 120 monks, and 2 incarnation <i>bla ma</i> . The monastery closed after religious reform in 1958, and most monks resumed secular life. It was later reopened but closed again during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Reopening in 1982, the monastery underwent extensive rebuilding, including a large scripture hall, prayer wheel rooms, corridors, courtyards, and monks' quarters. In 2023, the monastery covered an area of about 300 <i>mu</i> ¹ and is under the jurisdiction of the original Khang rgan a bzod Tribe's tent Monastery (Nian and Bai 1993:280).
Bla rung sgar Monastery	Bdud 'joms rdo rje ² (1935-1904) established Bla rung sgar in 1880. A <i>bshad grwa</i> 'center for teaching' and a small <i>sgrub grwa</i> 'retreat center' were constructed at Bla rung sgar in 1980 (Reb

¹ 300 *mu* = 20 hectares.

² See <https://bit.ly/3zGshmd> 29 March 2023 for more on Bdud 'joms rdo rje.

	gong pa 'jigs med bsam grub 1995:376-378).
Bsu ba Monastery	In 1728, Gnyan rtse dpon slob ngag dbang chos 'phel (1685-1756) founded Dga' ldan bkra shis chos gling that later came to be known as Bsu ba dgon. Bsu ba Monastery is located in Bsu ba Township, Rnga ba (Aba) County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Si khron (Sichuan) Province. ¹
D+hIHphu Monastery	D+hIHphu Monastery was established in 1844 by Sde nang sku chen kun dga' rgyal mtshan. It is located in D+he ku Township, Rnga ba County.
Dga' ldan Monastery	In 1409, Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419) established Dga' ldan Monastery located approximately 30 miles east of Lhasa City (Dga' ldan dgon pa dang brag yer pa'i lo rgyus 1991:5). ²
Rdo grub chen Monastery	Rdo grub chen Monastery was established in 1852 by 'Jigs med phun tshogs 'byung gnas (1824-1864) (Reb gong pa 'jigs med bsam grub 1995:337-338).
Sgo mang Monastery	In 1790, Kun mkhyen sku 'phreng gnyis pa rje btsan dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang bo (1728-1791) founded Sgo mang Monastery, also known as Mdo smad rnga yul sgo mang dgon bshad sgrub 'phel rgyas gling (Ldong yon tan rgya mtsho 2000:32-44). ³
Stag lung Monastery	Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling (De he long kong xing yuan li xi lun zhou) is in Stag lung Valley, Khang sar Township in the south of Gcig sgril County, 6 kilometers from the county town. It was founded by Bstan pa'i dbang phyug and Tshul khrims bzang po in 1983 (Nian and Bai 1993:279).

¹ For more about Bsu ba Monastery, see <https://bit.ly/3KMpDlJ> 9 April 2023.

² For more on Dga' ldan Monastery, see <https://bit.ly/3ZQsKxd> 7 April 2023.

³ For more on Sgo mang Monastery, see <https://bit.ly/3fGMSAP> 12 November 2022.

	Rdza mu ra sprul sku ¹ taught based on merging Gsar ma, Rnying ma, and Jo nang schools in a <i>nag sgar</i> 'nomad tent monastic community' that moved with the local Khang sar Tribe. In 1942, some Gsar ma followers separated from the <i>nag sgar</i> and built a temple in Dpon lung Valley, Smin thang Township Town. The ruins of this temple are visible today. Bstan pa'i dbang phyug ² and his nephew, Tshul khribs bzang po (b. 1946), built a new Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling in about 1982. In 1983, the monastery had 21 monks and <i>bla ma</i> . In 2022, there were about 300 monks and <i>bla ma</i> . ³
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Table 2. Place names

Name	Location
A bzod	a Sog ru Township community
Dbon pa	a community in Sgo mang (Gemo) Township, Rnga ba County
Gcig sgril	a county in Mgo log Prefecture
Gsa' khog	an area in Khang sar Township
Khang sar	a township in Gcig sgril County
Lha sa	capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region
Mgo log	an autonomous prefecture in Mtsho sngon Province
Mtha' ba	a community near Stag lung Monastery
Mtsho sngon	a province in northwest China
Pad+ma	Pad+ma County
Rnga ba	Rnga ba County
Si khron	a province adjoining Mtsho sngon

¹ 1918-1958. For more, see <https://bit.ly/3b78a8v> 27 July 2022 and <https://bit.ly/3PSqXTA> 27 July 2022.

² Khang sar bstan pa'i dbang phyug 1938-2014; <https://bit.ly/3Bln6dU> 27 July 2022.

³ Based on oral interviews with two monks at Stag lung Monastery (Phyogs las rnam rgyal and Thub chos) in 2022. For photos, see Gtsang rigs skal bzang rnam 'dren (2019:114-153) and Smith (2017:149).

Smin thang	a township in Gcig sgril County
Sog ru	a township in Gcig sgril County
Spen ma	Spen ma Valley, Khang sar Township

Table 3. People.

Name	Background
'Be tho	Bsod dar's (1943-2016) father
'Jam dbyangs skyabs (Jiayangjian)	the author
'Jigs phun (b. 2015)	son of Mi 'gyur and Phyug mtsho
'Phrin las rgya mtsho (19??-1970)	Bsod dar's cousin
A khu bkra phun (1946-2020)	a <i>bla ma</i> from A bzod Monastery
A khu blos tshul	a monk who was once a <i>mkhan po</i> in Rdo grub chen
A khu stag lha (1945-2018)	a doctor and a <i>bla ma</i>
Bde sgrol (b. 1947)	<i>yig brgya'i 'khor lo</i> belongs to her, a <i>dge bsnyen ma</i> , and the focus of Part 6
Bde skyid	Bde skyid was 'Be tho's sister. They had four siblings.
Blo brtan	a horse herder of Sgo mang Monastery known as Rgya rag because of his thick beard
Blo ldan	'Be tho's brother. They had four siblings.
Bsod dar (1943-2016)	Don skyid's husband.
Bstan pa'i dbang phyug (1938-2014)	founded Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling in 1983 (Nian and Bai 1993:279)
Chos mdzad (b. 1938)	Yi po's (b. 1941) husband
Dkar dbang	Khang sar Tribal leader
Dkon bsam (1953--2005)	Bde sgrol's husband
Dme shul bza' shar ba	Bsod dar's great grandmother

Dme sman	Dme shul bza' shar ba's husband
Don skyid (b. 1946)	Bsod dar's wife
Dpal ldan skyid	Tshe brtan's daughter
G.yang phyug	Tshe brtan's daughter
G.yang res (b. 1990)	Don skyid's granddaughter
Gshin rje chos rgyal	the Lord of Death
Hwar ba a lags (b. 1948)	the head <i>bla ma</i> of Sgo mang Monastery
Jigme Puntsok, 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Chos rje yid bzhin nor bu, Khenpo Jigme Puntsok, Mkhan po 'jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2004)	He developed Bla rung sgar (Larung gar, Si khron), a Buddhist Mountain retreat focused on Buddhist teachings in the 1980s.
Kho lo	wife of Dkar dbang
Khra bza' sher mtsho	'Be tho's wife
Khya bza'	an alternative name for Kho lo
Khya dge a legs	According to Don skyid, he was a <i>bla ma</i> from Sgo mang Monastery who did not wear monastic robes, was married, had several children, and was a good <i>bla ma</i> and <i>mo pa</i> 'diviner'.
King of Rme'u (1916-1966)	Born in Rnga ba, Dpal mgon 'phrin las rab brtan (Pelgon Trinle Rabten) was the last King of the Meu Kingdom. His mother, Queen Dpal chen don grub mtsho (Pelchen Dondrub Tso), ruled the kingdom until Rabten came of age. ¹
Lcam gyi bra bo	A bzod Tribe male deity
Lcam gyi bra mo	A bzod Tribe female deity
Mgo tshul	a relative of Dkar dbang and living in 2023

¹ <https://bit.ly/3U6DaXd> 4 November 2022.

Mi 'gyur (b. 1983)	Chos mdzad and Yi po's adopted son
Myang lu	found Don skyid's <i>thar 'khor</i>
PaN chen rin po che (1938-1989)	the 10 th PaN chen <i>bla ma</i>
Phur ba (b. 1954)	Don skyid's brother
Phyag 'tshal a lags or Bsod nams rdo rje (b. 1971)	a Stag lung Monastery <i>bla ma</i>
Phyogs las rnam rgyal (b. 1971)	Don skyid's oldest monk son
Phyug mtsho (b. 1985)	Mi 'gyur's wife
Rab brtan (1944-1999)	Don skyid's brother
Rgya rag	Blo brtan's nickname
Ri lo	a blacksmith
Ri yongs dga' ldan	Dga' ldan Monastery in Lha sa sent him to our community. He arrived in the 1950s (Don skyid).
Rnam grol	Bde sgrol's brother
Rong dpal	A khu blos tshul's brother
Rtse pe (b. 1965)	Don skyid's daughter-in-law
Sher mtsho (1901-1983)	Don skyid's mother
Sman lha	Dme shul bza' shar ba's husband was also known as Dme sman
Snang gsal rgya mtsho (b. 1987)	Don skyid's second monk son
Tho skyid	'Be tho's sister
Thub chos (b. 1963)	a monk from Stag lung Monastery
Tshe brtan (b. 1968)	Bsod dar and Don skyid's oldest son
Tshul khrims bzang po (b. 1946)	Bstan pa'i dbang phyug's nephew
Ye shes dzang po (b. 1996)	Tshe brtan and Rtse pe's son
Yi po (b. 1941)	Chos mdzad's wife

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TIBETAN TERMS

'be tho འབེ་ཐོ།

'dre འདྲེ།

'jam dbyangs skyabs

འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐུབས།

'jigs phun འཇིགས་ཕུན།

'khor lo འཁོར་ལོ།

'khor lo'i yu ba འཁོར་ལོའི་ཡུ་བ།

'khor lte འཁོར་ལྷེ།

'khor rdo འཁོར་རྩོ།

'khor thag འཁོར་ཐག།

'khor yo འཁོར་ཡོ།

'og lte འོག་ལྷེ།

'phrin las rgya mtsho འཕྲིན་ལས་རྩ་

མཚོ།

'then 'khor འཐེན་འཁོར།

'then lung འཐེན་ལུང།

a bzo ཨ་བཙོ།

a khu bkra phun

ཨ་ཁུ་བཀ་ཕུན།

a khu blos tshul

ཨ་ཁུ་བོས་ཚུལ།

a khu stag lha ཨ་ཁུ་སྐྱག་ལྷ།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

bcu tshad བཅུ་ཚད།

bde sgrol བདེ་སྐྱོལ།

bde skyid བདེ་སྐྱིད།

bka' 'gyur བཀའ་འགྱུར།

bla ma བླ་མ།

bla rung sgar བླ་རུང་སྐར།

blo brtan བློ་བརྟན།

blo ldan བློ་ལྡན།

bshas sha བཤས་ཤ།

bsod dar བསོད་དར།

bstan pa'i dbang phyug བསྐྱུན་པའི་

དབང་ཕུག

bsu ba བསུ་བ།

btags grol བཏགས་རྫོལ།

bu rgyus sbra ring tshang

བུ་རྒྱུས་སྐུ་རིང་ཚང།

bu rgyus sbra ring tshang gi
sbra red rgya shar ba 'bab
sa red

བུ་རྒྱུས་སྤྱི་རིང་ཤང་གི་སྤྱི་རེད།

སྤྱི་ཤར་རེད་འབབ་ས་འེད།

bye lcags བྱེ་ལྷགས།

bye ma ka ra བྱེ་མ་ཀ་ར།

byang chub sgröl ma

བྱང་ཆུབ་སྒྲོལ་མ།

chod 'og tu 'phangs pa

ཚོད་འོག་ཏུ་འཕངས་པ།

chod nag la shor ba

ཚོད་ནག་ལ་ཤོར་བ།

chos mdzad ཚས་མཛད།

chos rje yid bzhin nor bu ཚས་རྩེ་

ཡིད་བཞིན་རྩོར་བུ།

chung sri རྒྱུང་སྤྱི།

D+hIHphu རྩེ་ཕུ།

dbon pa དབོན་པ།

dbyar gnas དབྱར་གནས།

dga' ldan དགའ་ལྡན།

dkar dbang དཀར་དབང་།

dkon bsam དཀོན་བསམ།

dme shul bza' shar ba

དམེ་ཤལ་བཟའ་ཤར་བ།

dme sman དམེ་སྐྱུ།

don skyid རོན་སྐྱིད།

dong tse རོང་ཙེ།

dpon lung དཔོན་ལུང་།

dung dkar དུང་དཀར།

g.yang khug གཡང་ཁུག།

g.yang res གཡང་རེས།

g.yang rten གཡང་རྟེན།

gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།

gcod གཙོད།

gdon གདོན།

gdon bgegs གདོན་བགེགས།

gdugs གདུགས།

gnam 'khor lo rtse dgu གནས་འཁོར་

ལོ་རྩེ་དགུ།

gsa' khog གསའ་ཁོག།

gsar ma གསར་མ།

gshin rje chos rgyal

གཤེན་རྩེ་ཚས་རྒྱལ།

gto bla གཏོ་བླ།

hwar ba a lags

ཧཱར་བ་ཨ་ལགས།

Jigme Puntsok, 'jigs med

phun tshogs འཇིགས་མེད་ཕུན་ཚུགས།

jo nang རྩོ་ནང་།

khang sar ཁང་སར།

Khenpo, mkhan po

མཁན་པོ།

kho lo ཁོ་ལོ།

khra bza' sher mtsho

ཁ་བཟའ་ཤེར་མཚོ།

khri ka, Trika ཁྲི་ཀ།

khya bza' ཁྱལ་བཟའ།

khya dge a legs

ཁྱེད་གེ་ཨ་ལགས།

klad nag ལྗང་ནག

la nye ལ་ཉེ།

Larung Gar, bla rung sgar ལྷ་རུང་

སྐར།

lcam gyi bra bo ལམ་གྱི་བ་བོ།

lcam gyi bra mo ལམ་གྱི་བ་མོ།

lha sa ལྷ་ས།

lug ba ལུག་བ།

lug ba'i sbra ལུག་བའི་སྤྱལ།

lung ring ལུང་རིང་།

ma Ni'i 'khor lo

མ་ཉིའི་འཁོར་ལོ།

ma Ni མ་ཉེ།

mchong མཚོང་།

mdud pa མདུད་པ།
 mdung dar smug po can མདུང་དར་སྐྱུག་པོ་ཅན།
 mdung dar smug po མདུང་དར་སྐྱུག་པོ།
 mdzo མཛོ།
 mdzo stag stag dung rked མཛོ་སྐྱུག་སྐྱུག་དུང་རྒྱུ་ཅན།
 can མཛོ་སྐྱུག་སྐྱུག་དུང་རྒྱུ་ཅན།
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 mgo tshul མགོ་ཚུལ།
 mi 'gyur མི་འགྱུར།
 mkhan po མཁན་པོ།
 mo pa མོ་པ།
 mtha' ba མཐའ་བ།
 mtsher shul མཚོར་ཤུལ།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒྲོན།
 myang lu མྱང་ལུ།
 nag po dgu sbyor རྒྱ་པོ་དགུ་སྟོར།
 nag sgar རྒྱ་སྐར།
 nag tshang རྒྱ་ཚང།
 ni'i 'khor lo ཁིའི་འཁོར་ལོ།
 nyal sbra ཉལ་སྐྱ།
 oM a mi de wa hrIH ཨོཾ་མི་དེ་ཨ་ཧཱི།
 pad+ma པད་མ།
 paN chen པཎ་ཅན།
 paN chen rin po che པཎ་ཅན་རིན་པོ་ཅེ།
 phur ba ཕུར་བ།
 phur ma ཕུར་མ།
 phyag 'tshal a lags ཕྱལ་མཚལ་ཨ་ལགས།
 phye ཕྱེ།
 phyogs las rnam rgyal ཕྱོགས་ལས་རྣམ་རྒྱལ།
 phyug mtsho ཕྱུག་མཚོ།

pra pa པ་པ།
 rab brtan རབ་བརྟན།
 rag khrom 'khor lo རག་ཁྲོམ་འཁོར་ལོ།
 rdo grub chen རྩ་གུབ་ཅན།
 rdo rje རྩ་རྗེ།
 rdza mu ra sprul sku རྩ་མུ་ར་སྐྱུལ་སྐུ།
 rgya rag རྒྱ་རག།
 ri lo རི་ལོ།
 ri yongs dga' ldan རི་ཡོངས་དགའ་ལྡན།
 ril bu རིལ་བུ།
 rme'u རེའུ།
 rnam grol རྣམ་གྲོལ།
 rnga ba རྩ་བ།
 rnying ma རྩིང་མ།
 rong dpal རོང་དཔལ།
 rta bra bra ར་བ་བ།
 rtsam pa རུས་པ།
 rtse pe རེ་ཤེ།
 rtsis pa རུས་པ།
 sa pad+ma 'dab brgyad ས་པད་འདབ་བརྒྱུད།
 sbra gso སྐྱ་གསོ།
 sbra leb སྐྱ་ལེ།
 sde dge སྡེ་དགེ།
 seng gdong srung bzlog 'khor སེང་གདོང་སྒུང་བརྒྱུག་འཁོར་ལོ།
 ser lo སེར་ལོ།
 sgar gyi phreng ba སྐར་གྱི་ཕྱེང་བ།
 sgo mang སྐོ་མང།
 sgrol ma'i 'khor lo སྐྱོལ་མའི་འཁོར་ལོ།
 sher mtsho ཤེར་མཚོ།
 shi sha ཤེ་ཤ།

shi tshigs ཤི་ཚིགས།
 si khron སི་ཁྲོན།
 sked thag སྐད་ཐག
 skye rgyud སྐེ་རྒྱུད།
 sman lha སྐན་ལ།
 smin thang སྐན་ཐང་།
 snang gsal rgya mtsho

སྐང་གསལ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 sog ru སོག་རུ།
 spen ma སྤེན་མ།
 spen ma'i g.yu rgyal
 phyug mo
 སྤེན་མའི་གཡུ་རྒྱལ་ཕྱལ་མོ།
 sre chen སྤེན་ཆེན།
 srog shing སྤོག་ཤིང་།
 srung 'khor སྤྲུང་འཁོར་།
 stag lung dgon ka dag
 spros bral gling སྤྲུག་ལུང་དགོན་ཀ་དག་ཐྱོས་
 བལ་ཐྱིང་།

stag lung སྤྲུག་ལུང་།
 steng lte སྤེང་ལྗེ།
 thar 'khor ཐར་འཁོར་།
 thar mdo ཐར་མདོ།
 tho skyid ཐོ་སྐྱིད།
 thub chos ཐུབ་ཚམས།
 tog ཐོག་།
 tshe brtan ཚེ་བརྟན།
 tshogs sbra ཚོགས་སྤྲ།
 tshul khrims bzang po
 ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་བཟང་པོ།
 ye shes dzang po
 ཡེ་ཤེས་བཟང་པོ།
 yi po ཡི་པོ།
 yig brgya ཡིག་བརྒྱ།
 zha ye ཇེ་ཡེ།
 zhe dgu ཇེ་དགུ།
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།
 zog ba ཙོག་བ།

CHINESE TERMS

Aba 阿坝
 Dongfeng 东风
 Gemo 格莫
 gongshe 公社
 Guoluo 果洛
 Guide 贵德
 Hanzi 汉子

Jiaguan 加官
 Jiayangjian 加羊尖
 Jiuzhi 久治
 Ma De 玛德
 Qinghai 青海
 Sichuan 四川
 Xining 西宁

TIBETAN HATS IN MDO BA (DUOWA) PASTORAL COMMUNITY, REB GONG, A MDO, PR CHINA

Pad+ma rig 'dzin བདུ་མ་རིག་འཛིན། (Wanmerenzeng 完么仁增)*

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on hats and other apparel in a herding community (Mdo ba (Duowa) Town) in the east of Reb gong (Tongren City), Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Locally worn hats, including their names, materials, where they were obtained, and the time of their popularity, were drawn from discussions with local culture bearers who shared their experiences and memories of what they had learned from their elders. Twelve photographs are included.

KEYWORDS

Traditional Tibetan hat; fox-fur hat; Tibet; lambskin hat; wool felt; Indian hat; Mdo ba (Duowa), Reb gong (Rebgong)

LOCAL PROVERBS

ཡ་རབས་མགོ་ཡི་ཞུ་གོན་པ་ལས་མ་རབས་རྒྱང་གི་ལྷ་མ་ཁོ་ན།

ya rabs mgo yi zhwa gon pa las ma rabs rkang gi lham khon

Wearing a bad man's shoes is better than wearing a nobleman's hat.

མགོ་ཡི་ཞུ་བཞིན་བཀྲར།

mgo yi zhwa bzhin bkur

Respect them as much as their hat.

གྲུ་ཐུབ་པ་རིག་ན་ཞུ་མི་ཕྱང། རྒྱང་ཆེན་ལྷོན་པ་ཐུག་ན་ལམ་མི་ཕྱེ།

shAkya thub pa rig na zhwa mi phud/glang chen smyon pa thug na
lam mi phye

Seeing Gautama Buddha, he doesn't remove his hat; encountering
a mad elephant, he doesn't move away.

* Pad+ma rig 'dzin (Wanmerenzeng). 2023. Hats in an A mdo Pastoral Community, PR China. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:150-177.

མི་དྭྱར་དྭྱར་གྱི་མགོ་ལ་ཞུ་ནག་ནག་མ་སྒྲོན།

Mi dkar dkar gyi mgo la zhwa nag nag ma skon

Don't put a black hat on the head of a white person.

(Don't falsely accuse an innocent person.)

A full moon hung like a big drum in the eastern sky of our winter pasture on the fifteenth night of a chilly winter month in the year of the Wooden Pig (1995). Sister and I finished dinner quickly and rushed out into the milky night to a rectangular area between the yak pens of my family and a neighbor family where neighbor kids, Sister, and I played on moonlit nights. In the spring, elders grew *yu go* 'oats' (*Avena sativa* L.) here, harvested and dried it, and fed it to livestock in the early spring.

One after another, four boys and six girls – all neighbor kids – came where we waited. One girl was from a bit further away. She was the relative of one of our neighbors and was spending a night with them at their home. *Zhag 'dug* is the term we used for spending a night at a friend's home, a very exciting event during my childhood - the 1990s – partly because we learned new folktales and riddles. When one of my friends spent a night with my family, Father read *Pad+ma 'od 'bar*¹ for us before dinner. My friend was so obsessed with the tale that Father promised her to read the unfinished part the next time she visited.

After a long discussion, Sister and the other older kids chose two games. The first was the camel game that elders opposed because some children were easily frightened by the make-believe camel, and potentially dangerous tools like hoes were used in this game.

We prepared everything to play the camel game. Sister and two other children stood under a man's Tibetan robe turned inside-

¹ One of the great Tibetan hagiographies:

...it concerns a former life of Padmasambhava and takes place thousands of years ago in India, under the reign of a king hostile to Buddhism. The king imposes on the child ordeals thought to be unsurmountable from which he emerges victorious. He ends by overthrowing the king and establishes Buddhism in the kingdom <https://bit.ly/3em231l> 3 September 2022.

out. Sister held the long wooden handle of a hoe thrust straight up through one of the sleeves. Two pieces of light woolen cloth tied to the head of a hoe resembled camel eyes. A tall boy stood in the middle, and a girl stood beside him, representing the camel's humps. Suddenly, a gigantic 'live' camel appeared before the kids! As the camel moved around, we cheered in excitement, ran around the camel, and tried to touch it, but its hindleg - the girl at the end - kicked us away.

The second game was to dress a girl as a bride. Sister quickly came up with the idea of bringing the old fox-fur hat from the bottom of our black wooden box next to the altar in the upper part of our adobe house and covered by a yak skin. I never knew the date the fox hat was made nor to who it belonged. This *wa zhwa rwa 'dzig* 'fox-fur hat' (see below) had a horn-like tapered crown. Locals borrowed this hat occasionally for wedding ceremonies. My family kept the fox-fur hat in that wooden box at that time (the 1990s). Gradually, we lost its top metal ornament and, eventually, the fox hat itself. I searched for this hat but didn't find it when I went home last year.

Sister was the oldest and advised making up the "bride." She chose a girl and helped her put on the formal robe. Sister removed her earrings and told the "bride" to wear them. The "bride" also received three coral necklaces from the older female children. Girls prepared silver ornaments - *bzho bzung* and *glo mgo*¹ (see FIG 4) that women wore during their wedding ceremonies and other social gatherings such as horse races and Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year'.

After the "bride" wore the fox-fur hat and hung a white cloth over her face as a veil, she suddenly became a real bride. We solemnly went through rituals for each step of our imaginary wedding ceremony. A female child dressed as a boy joined the bridal party, and we sang folksongs and teased each other.

¹ Literary Tibetan: *glo gzar*. See <https://bit.ly/3cucgbr> 30 August 2022 for a short introduction to silver ornaments and an image.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on hats in a herding community east of Reb gong¹ (Tongren County), Mtso sngon Province, PR China. The names and materials of locally made hats and the creation process are described following consultations with local residents who shared their experiences and memories of what they had heard from their elders.

In the summer of 2022, young locals wore white wool-felt hats (FIG 11) similar to American Western cowboy hats, with slightly curved brims on both sides. Such hats are available via online shopping platforms such as Jingdong and Taobao under "Western Cowboy Hat in Tibetan Style" and "Tibetan New Style Hat."²

One of our eldest local elders, Gcod le (b. 1937), commented on changes in the local lifestyle and community attire since the late 1990s:

In the last few years, everything has been changing so rapidly. The clothing the young generation wear, the food we eat, and the machines we use daily are very strange to me. People tell me that youth wear clothes of different styles and colors. Even the Tibetan sash is a different color. In my time, we only had red sashes.

Recognizing these dramatic changes, I present this article as what can be studied and presented, recording additional information about traditional attire with the help of what aged elders remembered. This is important in creating a record of the past and provides a model for preserving local knowledge that is fast diminishing.

The *wa zhwa rwa 'dzig*³ 'horned fox-fur hat' is a traditional

¹ Officially: Thun rin, however, locals use "Reb gong."

² For popular new hats, see <https://bit.ly/3RkeJ6t> 30 September 2022.

³ My father (Chos ko, b. 1963) related a story about this hat he had heard in his childhood:

The special fox-fur hat was designed for Tibetan king Glang dar ma (reigned, 838-842) who had a horn on his head. He wore the horn-like-crown hat to hide this secret from the people of Tibet.

hat with a slightly backward and tapering crown with a bronze ornament on top and red ribbons hanging from the bottom of the top ornament. The crown is wool felt, and the top is covered with black fabric. The lower part is covered with red fabric. A round piece of fox fur that serves as the brim is adjacent to the red fabric. The hat's fox-fur part is folded when put on and unfolded when put away.

The *tsar zhwa* 'lambskin hat' is similar in shape to the horned fox-fur hat, but a piece of lambskin is used rather than fox-fur. Gcod le (b. 1937) described fox-fur and lambskin hats:

I only saw horned fox-fur hats in Mdo ba. In 1958, one of our Yo lag community members and I went to Zi ling to meet Tshe 'phags' father, who was imprisoned there, and escort him home. Later, he said, "I recognized the two-horned fox-fur hats you guys were wearing from far away, so I knew you were men from Mdo ba." He was skilled at designing and sewing this hat.

We usually bought cloth and other goods from Rong bo [Longwu].¹ Bla brang (Xiahe) was the nearest marketplace before 1958, but we rarely went there because of conflicts over stolen livestock and goods. The hat's metal ornament was available in Bla brang decades ago. Rich people wore this fox-fur hat in daily life during winter. Ordinary people wore it during Lo sar, horse races, other gatherings, and moving to a new pasture with their livestock. Lambskin hats were worn in summer. New brides and other female community members wore such hats while driving pack animals and livestock to new pastures. Once when we were moving from winter pasture to summer pasture, all the women wore lambskin hats and rode horses. I still remember that wonderful scene.

In my childhood (1990s), brides wore horned fox-fur hats during their wedding ceremonies. Later, women wore a fox-fur hat known as *rna drud* 'ear dragging' that originated in Bla brang, where such fox-fur hats were worn during Smon lam chen mo² 'the Great

¹ The location of Tongren City Town, which that locals refer to as "Rong bo."

² Tupden Jinpa (2019) suggests:

...between 1406 and the summer of 1408, Tsongkhapa first had the idea of hosting a grand prayer festival at the holy Jokhang Temple in Lhasa." ... It was held to honor the Buddha's performance of miracles at Śrāvastī in central India, which, according to the Tibetan calendar, occurred in the first

Prayer Festival', Lo sar, and weddings in winter. This woman's fox-fur hat grew in popularity in Mdo ba around 2000. Brocade covered the crown, the hat was trimmed with fox fur, and the tips of the ears drooped back.

Before this, women's fox-fur hat, the *wa to* 'cone-shaped fox-fur hat' (FIG 2), was popular. It had a higher crown of felt trimmed with fox fur. The higher crown was covered with brocade or *phrug khra*¹ 'colorful woolen cloth of various patterns'. The popularity of the 'ear-dragging' hat was such that the *wa to* gradually disappeared.

Rna drud is not a new hat name for locals because the fox-fur hat for men is known as *wa zhwa rna drud*, 'ear dragging fox-fur hat' (FIG 3). The male *rna drud* featured a brocade crown, and the fox-fur trim was larger than the women's 'ear dragging' hat. Also, its two ear tips drooped to the front, explaining the name. The inner part of the fox-fur trim was wool felt. A protruding stitch where the wool felt and fox skin were brought together at the bottom of the fox fur trim was covered by red cloth, adding to its attractiveness.

Locals banned precious skins and fur apparel in 2006 (Lobsang Yongdan 2018). Afterward, no locals wore fox-fur hats in Mdo ba, even during wedding ceremonies. In recent wedding ceremonies (~2022), brides wore lambskin hats with a crown cover of various fabrics and brocades of different colors from the top to the lower part of the crown (FIG 1).

month of the year.

'Jigs med theg mchog (1988:134) writes that tThe grand prayer festival [in Reb gong] began in the year of the Water Dog (1742) after the Second Skyabs mgon [Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho (b. 1678-1739)] 'Great Religious Leader of Reb gong'.

¹ In the 1990s or earlier, locals cut colored woolen cloth into thin narrows strips (<https://bit.ly/3pA11B7> 6 September 2022) to trim Tibetan robes. Locals distinguish *phrug rdo phrug* and *phrug 'o rta* according to patterns. *Phrug* 'sheep wool cloth' is alternatively known as *snam bu* [Ch, *pulu*]. *Rdo phrug* (<https://bit.ly/3dLCXIO> 22 August 2022) features alternate strips colored red, yellow, green, brown, blue, etc. (see the robe trim in FIGS 2 & 6). For *phrug 'o rta* ('*o rta* 'churning stick') robe trim (see FIG 4), see <https://bit.ly/3CjvF9l> and <https://bit.ly/3T72IDG> 22 August 2022.

The most traditional hat is the *phying zhwa* 'Tibetan felt hat' that locals wear daily. Made of wool felt, there are at least two types. One is locally known as *phying zhwa mgo ring* 'long-headed [crown] felt hat' (FIG 7). Locals no longer make this felt hat, but local children wear it during Lo sar and other social gatherings. The long-headed felt hat is available in the markets of Reb gong. Karma smon lam and Skal bzang nor bu (2005:9) describe the *phying zhwa rtse ring* 'long headed [crown] felt hat' as a summer hat for the Reb gong people.

The second type has a brim similar to the Indian felt hat. A senior local monk recalled:

When I herded calves at the start of the summer season, some community members tried to make a wool felt hat using a large mortar to make wool felt into the crown and create the shape of a *rgya zhwa* 'Indian hat', but the Indian felt hat is more beautiful and better quality than this homemade felt hat.

Karma smon lam and Skal bzang nor bu (2005:12) describe Indian felt hats:

Rgya gar zhwa mo 'Indian hat' is made of felt and its shape and quality are more beautiful and better than Tibetan felt hats. ...the [Indian] hat was brought at the very beginning by Tibetan business people [into Tibet], and because of that, the hat was known as *Rgya gar zhwa mo*. However, in other Tibetan areas, like Gtsang, the felt hat was colloquially known as *phing zhwa* or *phyi zhwa* 'foreign hat' because [locals] saw foreigners wearing the Indian felt hat.

*Rgya zhwa*¹ is a short form for *rgya gar zhwa mo* 'Indian hat'. Locals use *rgya zhwa*, *rgya zhwa li mo*, and *rgya gar li mo* alternatively to refer to the Indian hat. Of note is the use of *gya gar*, a Tibetan term for India, while *li mo* is phonetically a Chinese word in Tibetan, referring to a sort of top hat.² The combination of these two terms translates as "Indian hat." Some community elders said the Indian felt hat was locally popular before 1949.

¹ Some online dictionaries mistakenly translate "*rgya zhwa*" as 'Chinese cap'.

² See *li mo* at <https://bit.ly/3rfKEuq> 30 September 2022.

In the 1990s, local young women wore Indian felt hats with plastic flowers during horse races and other summer social gatherings. Young men wore Indian felt hats without flowers. Young people wore new hats for social gatherings, while elders kept their old hats for years.

My father went to Zi ling (Xining), the capital of Mtsho sngon Province, in 1995 and returned home with a big box of Indian felt hats he sold to locals except one for my sister (b. 1984). It was spring, so we had not yet moved to the summer pasture. Locals bought hats for summer when they would participate in social gatherings. The hats protected their faces from intense mid-summer sunlight on the high Plateau.

Around 2010, a brown felt hat was popular among locals, particularly women. This hat and a white felt hat, similar in style that became popular in 2015, were locally placed in the *rgya zhwa* (FIGS 9&10) category. These hats were available in Thun rin (Tongren) markets and Bsang chu (Xiahe) County Town. Local shop owners sold them periodically in Mdo ba Town. Gradually, locals began wearing wool felt hats of different colors and styles.

FIG 1. Dkar mo (b. 2004) wears a lambskin hat and other wedding apparel at her home in Mdo ba Town (2021, unidentified photographer). She wears a *tsha ru* 'lambskin robe' with a coral inlaid silver belt, a pair of gold earrings, and a gold necklace.



FIG 2. A *wa to* worn by Rta mgrin skyid (b. 1950) (Thun rin City Town, 1993, unidentified studio photographer). She wears a pair of silver earrings and necklaces, including at least one string of coral.



FIG 3. *Wa zhwa rna drud'* ear dragging fox-fur hat'. Rig' dzin rdo rje (b. 1968) (winter pasture Khug rgan, Mdo ba Town, 1994, Rin chen don 'grub). Rifles were popular among local herders. Community elders suggested the first rifle local herders used may have been the *me mda'* 'Tibetan musket', locally known as *smān bo'u* 'powder rifle'.¹ The rifle in this photo was a .22 Long Rifle (LR), locally known as *phyi bo'u* 'marmot rifle'.² As a child, I saw my brother (Rin chen don 'grub, b. 1981) and his herding companions kill a marmot with a .22 LR. Local herders began concealing their rifles in the late 1990s and early 2000s. By about 2015, the government had confiscated all local private and community rifles.



¹ *Sman* 'medicine' refers to gunpowder.

² Locals also use the Chinese name *xiaokou qiang* 'small barrel rifle'. For more, see <https://bit.ly/3RTWbLb> 11 September 2022.

FIG 4. *Wa to* and *wa zhwa rna drud* worn by (L) 'Jigs byed 'tsho (b. 1973) and (R) Lcags thar skyid (b. 1970; with her son, Lha mchog rdo rje (b. 1996) (Reb gong Town, 1999, unidentified studio photographer). 'Jigs byed 'tsho wears a *glo mgo* 'side silver ornament'¹ on her right. Both women wear *skag rdo/skag bsdoms* 'belt' *bzho bzung* 'milk hooks' on their left. Both wear *tsha ru* 'lambskin robe', formal winter attire. The robes worn in FIGS 2 & 4 were designed before 2000. Afterward, most women's robes resemble the robes in FIGS 5 & 6. Note the difference in the upper trim² on the robes. 'Jigs byed 'tsho's robe features *phrug gseg 'dra* 'tilted trim', popular among younger people. Lha mchog rdo rje wears a *phyag mdud* 'sacred knot' likely given by a respected religious figure. The center of the red cloth strip features a small *sku* that, in this case, is a small metal Buddha image worn to protect against evil.

¹ Local women no longer wear such side silver ornaments.

² Robe trim is generally known as *phrug khra*.



FIG 5. *Wa zhwa rna drud* worn by (L) Gzungs 'dus 'tsho (b. 1984) and (R) Chos ko (b. 1975) (Reb gong Town, 2006, unidentified studio photographer). Both women wear *tsha ru* 'lamb skin robes', several strings of coral, silver earrings, and silver belts. Coral necklaces and silver/gold necklaces and earrings were locally banned after 2006, but around 2015, local women gradually resumed wearing gold and silver necklaces and *rna tog* 'earrings' and silver belts. Chos ko wears a coral inlaid *dn gul gyi ga'u* 'silver amulet'. Such amulets often contain sacred objects such as *mdud pa* 'knots' given by religious figures, medicines in the form of *za yig* 'eating letters' that might be paper with illness-curing mantras to cure illness, a piece of cloth from a religious figure's *gzan* 'kasaya', and so on.



FIG 6. *Wa zhwa rna drud* and *po de rna bzhi* 'four eared hat' worn by (L) Gzungs 'dus 'tsho (b. 1984) and (R) Gcod pa 'tsho (b.1994) (Reb gong Town, 2006, unidentified studio photographer). Gzungs 'dus 'tsho wears a *tsha ru* 'lamb skin robe' trimmed with *sram* 'otter fur', a silver belt, several coral necklaces, and silver earrings. Gcod pa 'tsho wears a blue *pang khebs* 'apron' trimmed with *rdo phrug* with her *sru tshar* 'haired robe' also trimmed with *rdo phrug*. She also wears a *Po de rna bzhi* or *zhwa mo tshe ring skyin khebs* 'long-life hat'. Karma smon lam and Skal bzang nor bu (2005:7) describe this as a winter hat for the people of the Lha sa region. Some Mdo ba locals wore this hat before 1949, which became popular again among young Mdo ba people in the 2000s.



FIG 7. This modern 'long headed felt hat', locally known as *phying zhwa mgo ring*, is worn by 'Jigs med bsam 'grub (b. 2012) as he holds his birthday cake at his family's house in Mdo ba Township Town (2022, Gcod pa 'tsho). Senior villagers said the locally made felt hat approximates the style of this modern felt hat and added that more recently (in the 2020s), felt hats were made in Rtse khog (Zeku County) and other Tibetan areas. Both the collar and the ends of the sleeves of the robe worn by 'Jigs med bsam 'grub are brocade-lined, a recent trend.

Locals historically celebrated birthdays at three and, if a person lived long enough, at eighty, ninety, and one hundred. However, beginning in about 2013, young parents began purchasing birthday cakes from Thun rin City for their kids' birthdays.¹ 'Jigs med bsam 'grub's mother asked a local villager to buy a birthday cake (seventy-two RMB) and bring it to 'Jigs med bsam 'grub's home in his private car.

¹ See, for example, Lhun 'grub's description (Lhun 'grub et al. 2021) of his wife's relative's birthday party in 2015:

The little girl was wearing a Tibetanized shirt, blue-gray jeans, a birthday hat, and shyly blowing out the sparking candles stuck on the birthday cake. Some of her friends sang "Happy Birthday" in Chinese (207).

Lhun 'grub goes on to comment:

The difference between those my age and those about ten years younger is enormous in terms of many fundamental aspects of life, including food, celebrations, clothing, recreation, and conversation topics (207).



FIG 8. (L) Lcags sgron (b. 1989) and (R) Gcod pa (b. 1990) wear the *rgya zhwa* 'Indian hat' with plastic flowers during a local beauty pageant (Mdo ba Town, 2003, unidentified photographer). Flowers in hats worn by women were common in Mtsho sngon.¹ Both robes are trimmed in otter fur. The upper trim of Gcod pa's robe is *gzig* 'leopard skin'. Some locals used imitation animal fur trims on their robes, but this practice gradually stopped.

¹ See, for example, flowers in the hats of Mongghul (Tu) women in Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County (Limusishiden et al. (2014:161, 174, 184 dating to as early as 1984).



FIG 9. A *rgya zhwa* worn by Bsod nams tshe ring (b. 1987) in a Kha skya field of *me tog ser chen* 'marsh marigold' (*Caltha palustris* L.) (Mdo ba Town, 2021, 'Brug dkar tshe ring).



FIG 10. *Rgya zhwa* hats worn at a horse race in Mdo ba Town by (L-R) Skäl bzang rdo rje (b. 1993; *phrug lwa* or *phrug* 'woolen cloth' robe), Ting 'dzin skyabs (b. 2000; *ras lwa* 'thin-cloth robe'), Rdo rje tshe brtan (b. 2000; *ras lwa* 'thin-cloth robe'), and 'Jigs byed skyabs (b. 1998; *rtsag pa* 'sheep skin robe'). (2021, unidentified photographer).



FIG 11. Newly popular *rgya zhwa* hats worn by (L-R) Rna me 'tsho (b. 1996), Rta mgrin 'tsho (b. 1993), and Sgron dkar skyid (b. 2001), models for a local Tibetan robe company that designs and sells shoes, clothes, and other products. Rin chen bkra shis (b. 1996), a local herdsman, opened it in 2020. The company's logo is in the upper right-hand corner (Mdo ba Town, 2021, Rin chen bkra' shis). The face masks were because of COVID concerns.



FIG 12. A Mdo ba shop operated by Rin chen bkra shis (b. 1996) and his wife sells in-store and online products. They plan to expand the shop and increase product selection in December 2022 (Jo yag gyon chas tshad yod spyi gnyer khang 'Joyak Clothing Limited Company' in Mdo ba Township Town, 2022, Rin chen bkra' shis).



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TIBETAN TERMS

'brug dkar tshe ring

འབྲུག་དཀར་ཚེ་རིང་།

'jigs byed 'tsho འཇིགས་བྱེད་འཚོ།

'jigs byed skyabs

འཇིགས་བྱེད་སྐལ་ལྔ།

'jigs med bsam 'grub

འཇིགས་མེད་བསམ་འབྲུག་།

'jigs med theg mchog

འཇིགས་མེད་ཐེག་མཆོག་།

ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya

mtsho

ངག་དབང་འཕྲིན་ལས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

bla brang བླ་བླང་།

bsang chu བསང་ཆུ།

bsod nams tshe ring

བསོད་ནམས་ཚེ་རིང་།

bzho bzung བཞོ་བཟུང་།

gzungs 'dus 'tsho

གཟུངས་འདུས་འཚོ།

chos ko ཆོས་ཀྱི།

dkar mo དཀར་མོ།

gcod le གཙང་ལེ།

gcod pa 'tsho གཙང་པ་འཚོ།

gcod pa གཙང་པ།

glang dar ma གླང་དར་མ།

glo gzar གློ་གཟར།

glo mgo གློ་མགོ།

gtsang གཙང་།

gzan གཟན།

gzig གཟིག་།

Joyak, jo yag gyon chas tshad

yod spyi gnyer khang

རྩོ་ཡག་ཤོན་ཆས་ཚད་ཡོད་སྤྱི་གཉེར་ཁང་།

karma smon lam ཀམ་སྐྱོན་ལམ།

kha skya ཁ་སྐྱུ།

khug rgan ཁུག་རྒྱན།

lcags sgron ལུགས་སྒྲོན།

lcags thar skyid ལུགས་ཐར་སྐྱིད།

lha mchog rdo rje ལྷ་མཆོག་རྡོ་རྗེ།

li mo ལེ་མོ།

lo sar ལོ་སར།
 Lobsang Yongdan, blo bzang
 yon tan རྫོག་པ་ཡོན་ཏན།
 mdo ba མདོ་བ།
 mdud pa མདུད་པ།
 me tog ser chen མེ་རྟོག་མེར་ཆེན།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།
 pad+ma 'od 'bar བསྐྱེད་འབར།
 pad+ma rig 'dzin བསྐྱེད་རིག་འཛིན།
 Padmasambhava, pad+ma
 'byung gnas བསྐྱེད་འབྱུང་གནས།
 pang khebs བང་ཁེབས།
 phing zhwa ཕིང་ཞྭ།
 phrug 'o rta ཕུག་འོ་རྟ།
 phrug gseg 'dra ཕུག་གསེག་འདྲ།
 phrug khra ཕུག་ཁ།
 phrug lwa ཕུག་ལ།
 phyag mdud ཕྱག་མདུད།
 phyi bo'u ཕྱི་བོ་འུ།
 phyi zhwa ཕྱི་ཞྭ།
 phying zhwa mgo ring
 ཕྱིང་ཞྭ་མགོ་རིང་།
 phying zhwa rtse ring
 ཕྱིང་ཞྭ་རྩེ་རིང་།
 phying zhwa ཕྱིང་ཞྭ།
 po de rna bzhi པོ་དེ་རྣ་བཞི།
 ras lwa རས་ལ།
 rdo phrug རྩོ་ཕུག
 rdo rje tshe brtan རྩོ་རྩེ་ཆོ་བརྟན།
 rebgong, reb gong རེབ་གོང་།
 rgya gar li mo རྒྱ་གར་ལི་མོ།
 rgya gar zhwa mo རྒྱ་གར་ཞྭ་མོ།
 rgya zhwa རྒྱ་ཞྭ།
 rgya zhwa li mo རྒྱ་ཞྭ་ལི་མོ།
 rig 'dzin rdo rje རིག་འཛིན་རྩོ་རྩེ།
 rin chen bkra' shis
 རིན་ཆེན་བརྟ་ཤེས།

rin chen don 'grub
 རིན་ཆེན་དོན་འབྱུང།
 rma lho ར་ལྷོ།
 rna drud ར་བྱུད།
 rna me 'tsho ར་མེ་འཚོ།
 rna tog ར་རྟོག།
 rong bo རོང་བོ།
 rta mgrin 'tsho རྟ་མགིན་འཚོ།
 rta mgrin skyid རྟ་མགིན་སྦྱིད།
 rtsag pa རྩག་པ།
 sgron dkar skyid སྒོན་དཀར་སྦྱིད།
 skal bzang nor bu
 སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།
 skag rdo, skag bsdoms
 སྐག་རྩོ་ཡང་ན་སྐག་བསྐྱེས་མས།
 skal bzang rdo rje
 སྐལ་བཟང་རྩོ་རྩེ།
 sku སྐུ།
 skyabs mgon སྐལ་པ་མགོན།
 smon lam chen mo
 སྦྱོན་ལམ་ཆེན་མོ།
 sram སྐལ།
 sru tshar སྐུ་ཚར།
 thun rin སུན་རིན།
 ting 'dzin skyabs ཏིང་འཛིན་སྐལ་པ།
 tsar zhwa ཚར་ཞྭ།
 tsha ru ཚ་བུ།
 tshe 'phags ཚེ་འཕགས།
 Tsongkhapa, rje tsong kha ba
 རྩེ་ཙོང་ཁ་པ།
 Tupden Jinpa, thub bstan
 sbyin pa ཐུབ་བསྟན་བྱིན་པ།
 wa to ལ་ནོ།
 wa zhwa rna drud ལ་ཞྭ་རྣ་བྱུད།
 wa zhwa rwa 'dzig ལ་ཞྭ་ར་འཛིན།
 yo lag ཡོ་ལག།
 yu go ཡུ་གོ།

za yig ཟ་ཡིག

zhag 'dug ཞག་འདུག

zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Duowa 多哇

Huangnan 黄南

Huzhu 互助

Jingdong 京东

Longwu 隆务

pulu 穉穉

Qinghai 青海

Taobao 淘宝

Tongren 同仁

Tu 土

Wanmerenzeng 完么仁增

Xiahe 夏河

Xiaokou qiang 小口枪

Xining 西宁

Zeku 泽

A MONGGHUL WOMAN'S (B. 1968) TRADITIONAL ADORNMENTS AND FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

Tayinsuu (b. 1968), a Mongghul (Monguor, Tu) mother of three from Jughuari (Zhuoke) Mongghul Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Haidong City, Qinghai Province, PR China, was born with a cleft lip; attended a primary school in her natal Jughuari Village for five years; and herded cattle, donkeys, and horses on nearby mountains in her youth. Tayinsuu's mother (Zhinyahua, b. 1950) gave her traditional adornments to Tayinsuu as a dowry. This paper presents Tayinsuu's family narratives associated with these personal adornments and their cultural place in the Mongghul world. Tayinsuu's mother, who became a nun in ~1999, is also described. I interviewed Tayinsuu in Jughuari Village, Wushi Town, on 29 February 2020. Later, as I listened to the recorded interview, I took notes in Mongghul and wrote this text in English.

KEYWORDS

Asian women histories, Huzhu Tu County, Mongghul Buddhist nuns, Mongghul women ornaments, oral Tu history, Qinghai life narratives, Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Tu history

* Limusishiden (Li Dechun). 2023. A Mongghul Woman's (b. 1968) Traditional Adornments and Family. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:178-200.

INTRODUCTION¹

Mongghul ² (Monguor, Tu) women's traditional personal adornments are the subject of this paper. Tayinsuu (b. 1968), a Tu (Mongghul, Monguor) mother from Jughuari (Zhuoke) Mongghul Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Haidong City, Qinghai Province, PR China, was born with a cleft lip, attended a primary school in her natal Jughuari Village for five years, and herded cattle, donkeys, and horses on the mountains in her youth. Tayinsuu's mother (Zhinyahua, b. 1950) gave her traditional adornments to Tayinsuu as a dowry. Tayinsuu's narratives about these personal adornments and their cultural place in the Mongghul world are detailed. Zhinyahua, who became a nun in ~1999, is also described.

This paper is based on interviewing Tayinsuu in Jughuari Village on 29 February 2020 and photographs by my wife, Jugui. I took notes in Mongghul and wrote this text in English as I later listened to the recorded interview.

The paper provides photographs of Tayinsuu and Zhinyahua, followed by selected non-English terms for adornments and clothing, an overview of Tayinsuu's and Zhinyahua's lives, Tayinsuu's search for her mother in Hualong Hui Autonomous County (Haidong City, Qinghai Province), Zhinyahua's life in her home area, Tayinsuu's description of her necklace, and Tayinsuu's experiences with a cleft lip.

TERMS FOR WOMEN'S ADORNMENTS AND CLOTHING³

aiya, M (Mongolian) *giu*, *ogiu*, *oyuu* (pronounced *oyuu*); g.yu གཡུ, turquoise

chi, a protruding round dot on adornments

¹ I thank Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Norbu, Skal bzang nor bu) and Gengqiugelai (Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs) for their assistance with this paper.

² Mongghul spellings follow Li (1988), Tibetan terms are given in Wylie and Tibetan script, and Chinese is provided in Pinyin and Chinese characters.

³ M = Mongolian; Ch = Chinese; QC = Qinghai Chinese; T = Tibetan.

diudiuri, embroidered pocket-cover

giibii, three layers of cotton cloth glued together, creating a stable sewing base with new cotton cloth for the top layer and old cotton cloth for the bottom two layers

hgaija, traditional necklace; *mgul rgyan* མགུལ་རྒྱལ་ necklace

hindazi, QC *hanta* 汗褸 white shirt

manog, M *mana*, *manan*, *manughu* (pronounced *manuu*); Ch *manao* 瑪瑙, agate

mengu hgaija, silver plates with coral, agate, turquoise, and porcelain or pearl beads; *mengu* = M *mönggü*/n (dialectally pronounced *menggu* or *munggu*) silver

saimiin, gold-silver mixture

shan, *sran* བྲན་ otter fur

suuga, silver earrings for women, M *süike* or *süikü* (today pronounced *suix* or *siix*)

wajog, porcelain

xra wajog, yellow porcelain; *xra* = M *shira* 'yellow', Proto-Mongolic **sira* and Written M <*sira*>

xriga string of pearls or porcelain; M *erike*/n string of prayer beads, originally probably **xerike*

xuang koldii suuga, *xuang koldii suuga* = Ch *shuang* 雙 + M *köl-tei* 'with foot' + M *süike* (as above), double foot earrings

xuri, M *shürü*, also written *sirü*; *byu ru* བྱུ་རུ་ coral

PHOTOGRAPHS OF TAYINSUU AND ZHINYAHUA

FIG 1. Tayinsuu wears her traditional necklace and earrings (29 February 2020, Jugui). The collar fur is otter. She also wears an embroidered pocket cover on her white shirt (27 April 2020, Jugui).



FIG 2. Zhinyahua (20 April 2020, Tayinsuu).



PHOTOGRAPHS AND TAYINSUU'S ADORNMENTS

FIG 3. Tayinsuu's traditional neckwear (27 April 2020, Jugui). (1) coral, (2) turquoise, (3) agate, (4) gold-silver bead, (5) silver plate, (6) protruding round dots,¹ and (7) porcelain beads (rarely seen in the early 2020s).



FIG 4 (left). Tayinsuu's red coral beads (27 April 2020, Jugui). FIG 5 (right). Tayinsuu's yellow porcelain beads² (27 April 2020, Jugui).



¹ There are about sixty-two *chi*.

² A native of Gling rgyal Village suggested this might be *spos byu* 'amber coral' also known as *gser byu* 'golden coral'. A Xunhua Tibetan identified it as *spos she* 'amber'.

FIG 5. Tayinsuu's porcelain beads (27 April 2020, Jugui).



FIG 6. Tayinsuu's double foot earrings (27 April 2020, Jugui). One earring is composed of two coral beads and two silver spiral segments. Each earring has (1) two coral beads, (2) a turquoise bead, and (3) two agate beads. The remaining beads are porcelain.



FIGS 7 and 8. Tayinsuu's recently purchased earrings (27 April 2020, Jugui). The metal resembles silver, and the 'jewels' are plastic resembling turquoise and coral.



Mongghul women's adornments include silver earrings; traditional necklaces of coral, agate, turquoise, porcelain, silver, and gold fixed on a cloth base; strings of pearl or porcelain beads; and silver plates embedded with coral, agate, turquoise, and porcelain and pearl beads.

Necklaces and earrings were only inherited by daughters who did not marry and leave their parents' home. For example, Tayinsuu stayed in her parents' home early in her life. The husband was obligated to provide a necklace if a woman married and moved into her husband's home.

Zhinyahua had three rectangular silver plates. She donated one on a silver necklace to the village *purghan*,¹ Tayinsuu has one affixed to a silver necklace (FIG 1), and Tayinsuu's mother kept one. A few beads fell out of Tayinsuu's silver plate over time. Tayinsuu ignored this since she rarely wears it.

TAYINSUU'S LIFE

After five years of study, I stopped attending my village primary school and herded livestock because my family could not afford my further education. I was and am very busy with family chores and farm work and forgot almost all the Chinese characters I learned. I have gradually relearned some Chinese characters in recent years through WeChat and can now identify bus stops and public toilets when I travel to a city and write my name in Chinese characters. WeChat profoundly

¹ The Huzhu Mongghul word *purghan* is a regular development of Mongolic *burkan* (*burqan*) that basically means 'Buddha' and secondarily, any 'deity', 'god'. Etymologically, the Mongolic word is a borrowing from Ancient Uighur *burkan* (*burqan*), which is a compound of *bur* 'Buddha' and *kan* (*qan*) 'prince'. The first part, *bur*, is a borrowing from ancient Northwest Chinese **pur*, from an earlier **put*, which yields 佛 in modern Mandarin. In Huzhu Mongghul, as in regular Mongolian, the word is used both for the Buddha and of various other deities (Limusishiden et al. (2021:19).

Also see Limusishiden and Jugui (2010:23): The *purghan* is a deity in a sedan held by four men, or a cloth-covered pole held by one man. The *purghan* historically permeated Mongghul life and was available for consultation, representing the possibility that supplicants' distresses might be lessened. It was also consulted to identify a suitable spouse, treat disease, exorcise evil, ensure well-being and good harvests, and alleviate droughts.

impacts people's daily life and encourages people like me to learn more Chinese characters for texting.

My maternal grandmother, other people, and I camped in the mountains to graze twelve cattle, two donkeys, and one horse. My husband and I took turns grazing the animals after I married. Mother was *tulighui juuligha*¹ like me, so I never knew my father.

Mother's stepfather [Huaguarixja, ~1913~1993] was a Rgulang Monastery² monk. He had a younger brother who stayed at home when Huaguarixja was at the monastery, so I stayed in my home [not marrying and leaving] because. Huaguarixja was sent back to his village from Rgulang Monastery in 1958 and lived there until reassuming monkhood in 1978 at Rgulang Monastery. His younger brother accompanied him at this time.

Huaguarixja also led my younger brother (Rnqanzhaxi, b. 1971) to Rgulang to be a monk when he was eight. I had to stay home to care for Mother, so I did not marry or leave. My younger brother later became a layman and married.

My maternal grandmother's (Zhanggaga, 1914-1986) parents' home was in Jangja Village, Hongyazigou Township. Before she married and lived in my grandfather's home, she had a husband in Zanghgua Village, Wushi Town. Their relationship deteriorated. Grandmother left, married my grandfather, and gave birth to three children. My maternal uncle and his wife did not treat Grandfather well, so he told Mother she should stay home and care for my grandmother. Later, older villagers mediated, and Mother and her brother lived separately in one compound courtyard. Mother built a new courtyard compound there years later and lived with my grandmother until she died.

Grandmother and Mother were both tailors and learned written Tibetan.

I have been to Huangzhong and Hualong.³ I've never left Qinghai Province.

Half a year after I *tulighui juugha* in 1986, I married an impoverished

¹ A ritual (*tulighui juuligha* 'head put-on') for women who remain in their parents' home, have lovers, and bear children who are unacknowledged by their fathers, bear their mother's family clan name, and are considered members of their mother's clan (Limusishiden and Jugui 2010:51).

² Rgulang (T, Dgon lung byams pa gling; Ch, Youningsi) is a Dge lugs Monastery located in Sitan Village, Wushi Town. Pu (2013:71-75) reports it had 396 monks in 1957, while Smith (2013) reports "over 300 monks" (291) and also "340 monks" (293).

³ Huangzhong Region, Xining City and Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Haidong City are both located in Qinghai Province.

Tibetan (Danjanshang, 1964-1989) from Gantan Village, Wushi Town, through a matchmaker's introduction. His parents had died early, so he lived with two younger sisters and one younger brother. He moved into my home and brought his siblings because his family was too poor to support them. Danjanshang spoke Tibetan and understood Mongghul, but he didn't speak Mongghul when he was living in my home.

Danjanshang was a tall, handsome alcoholic who sometimes drank for three days and three nights at a stretch. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis and wiped the sweat from his forehead when he had a fever. He died six years after our marriage.

My second child (Durijidanzhu, b. 1985) was six the year he died, My first child (Durijizhunmaa, b. 1987) was four at that time, and I was pregnant with our third child (Durijizhankari b. 1989).

Danjanshang's two younger sisters and younger brother left to live in their former home in Gantan Village after Dananshang's death. They had grown up and could take care of themselves.

Jirasirang (b. 1963) from my village proposed marriage three years after Danjanshang's death. He is gentle and honest, and received a middle school education. He was too poor to find a wife easily. I told him I had three children and asked, "Would you like to raise them with me?"

He agreed, so I took my children to his home. I needed to care for them until they became adults.

My children didn't want to study after middle school further, so they became cattle herders. At that time, Mother studied Tibetan Buddhist scriptures in Hualong County and introduced my son, Durijidanzhu, to study Tibetan at Zhoka Naka, a Tibetan private school [Jianzha County, Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province]. I don't know where that school is exactly. Mother studied Tibetan and thought learning Tibetan would be helpful for Durijidanzhu. That's why he went there.

He graduated after three years and didn't find a job immediately, so he went to work in Ping'an Region, Haidong City, where he met a Tibetan from Langjia Village [Tongren County, Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture]. They fell in love and married, and my daughter-in-law moved into our home.

Durijizhunmaa married and moved into her husband's home in Shgeayili Village, Donggou Township, Huzhu County. Durijizhankari married a Chinese man and moved into his home in Gaozhai Town, Huzhu County.

MY MOTHER, ZHINYAHUA

She had stayed at her home as *tulighui juuligha* with her older brother, Rnsan (b. 1943), and her older sister, Duguasirang (~1946 - ~2019), before they became adults. Duguasirang married and moved into her husband's home in Qaaghuali Village, Dongshan Township. Mother built a new courtyard compound and moved there while her maternal uncle lived in the old family courtyard compound.

Mother's children are Rnqanzhaxi and me.

Mother is a devout Buddhist and studied Tibetan from a monk in Rdangyan Village, Wushi Town. She prostrates and recites Buddhist scriptures daily.

When Mother was forty-nine, she worshiped in Zhaagai Baizang ¹ Monastery in Xinghai County [Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province]. She was interested in that place and decided to stay there and volunteered to sew clothing for the monastery's deity images. When an incarnate lama she met at the monastery suggested she become a nun, Mother thought, "I have no husband, and my children are adults. Life is like that. I understand the meaninglessness of the material world."

This is how she became a nun, donned a nun's robe that she continues to wear today, rented a room, and lived with another nun.

One day, the monastery gave an emergency phone call, telling us to come as soon as possible, which is how we learned Mother's whereabouts. My brother and husband went there by tractor and found her wearing a nun's robe. She was not as ill as the emergency call had suggested.

Rnqanzhaxi scolded, "You look normal. You're not sick at all! You became a nun without telling your children! Why did you phone us?! Living here, you're far from us. No one will care for you in case of a real emergency."

Mother finally agreed to come home.

Rgulang Monastery is for monks. There is no nunnery in the Mongghul areas. Mother had no place to live and practice the dharma in our home area, so she stayed at my home for a couple of days before moving to my brother's home. She stayed for almost a year in our village.

Conflict eventually came. One day, my brother's wife scolded Mother,

¹ Located eighteen kilometers west of Sangdang Township, Xinghai County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. Saizong (Brag dkar sprel rdzong) Monastery. Founded in 1923, it had 377 monks and one reincarnate *bla ma* in 1981 (Nian and Bai 1993:206-207).

"You stay in the village wearing your cassock. You should stay in a nunnery!"

Mother angrily left for Xiaqiong Monastery¹ [Hualong County], where she found a monk to be her master and give her dharma teachings. She also sewed clothing for the monastery deity images.

Some months later, she went to sky burial grounds atop a mountain to meditate at her master's suggestion. She sat, meditating, unafraid of wolves, snakes, ghosts, and evils because she had successively lived in tents and caves beside 108 sky burial sites [where corpses are exposed to vultures] for three years in Hualong, Xunhua,² Huangzhong, Jianzha, Tongren, and Xiahe³ counties. Corpses are often chopped and fed to vultures at sky burial grounds, where there are many ghosts of dead people. She would pitch a tent on top of a mountain by a sky burial, sit in meditation, and recite Buddhist scriptures. Some days later, she would move to another mountain top. She continued this until she had stayed by 108 sky burials.

Chanting creates a smooth road for the deceased on their way to Hell. Locals believe chanting scriptures on top of mountains near sky burial locations with many ghosts and evils from countless corpses strengthened her spiritual power, helped her move her tent, and offered her food and water. Vultures did not fear her because she gave them her leftovers and occasionally chopped corpses into smaller pieces to encourage vultures to eat them.

Mother fears nothing after such experiences and likes living alone, particularly in remote areas. Her difficulties and memorable experiences include:

Mother sat cross-legged on the ground in front of her small tent one dark night as stars twinkled in the vast night sky. A big wolf suddenly appeared on an opposite ridge, stared at her, and howled in the night air. Another wolf appeared. Soon, a third wolf approached her right. The three wolves stared at her. Mother ignored them and continued reciting mantras. Seeing Mother did not move, the wolves surrounded her and jumped over her head one after another. Mother sat still without showing fear and anxiety. She continued chanting and not moving.

The wolves then lay on the ground and watched Mother.

¹ Located thirty-five kilometers west of Hualong County Town and ten kilometers south of today's Chapu Tibetan Township. In 1993, the monastery had 350 monks and four reincarnate lamas (Nian and Bai 1993:51-53).

² Xunhua Salar (Sala) Autonomous County, Haidong City.

³ Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

Suddenly one wolf rushed to Mother and knocked her over. Mother continued chanting, waiting for the wolves to eat her. She was ready to devote her body to those hungry wolves. However, the wolves continued lying on the ground staring at Mother until dawn, when they stood and slowly left.

One hot summer afternoon, Mother sat meditating and reciting scripture in a cave near a sky burial site when two big snakes slithered to the entrance of her cave, seemingly listening to her chanting. An hour later, they slithered away.

After learning Tibetan Buddhist mantras at sky burial sites for three years, Mother returned to Xiaqiong Monastery, lived in an abandoned quarter, and sewed clothes and adornments for the monastery's deity images. She learned Buddhism from her monk teacher in the monastery and rarely contacted outsiders. She sewed during the day and fetched water from the foot of the mountain for herself at night.

I had no news at all about Mother after she left our village. I thought she must have died.

MY SEARCH FOR MOTHER IN HUALONG COUNTY

One day, a man from Smee Village, Wushi Town, returned from worshipping at Xiaqiong Monastery with an oral message from Mother, who had asked him to tell me she was there. I was busy helping build a courtyard compound wall for a village family. I was so excited to receive this news that I immediately left for Hualong to find Mother without informing my family.

I first reached Ping'an Town. With no idea where Xiaqiong Monastery was, I asked locals, who told me how to reach Xiaqiong Monastery, so I boarded a bus. The driver let me off when we reached Chapu Township. Taking a minibus, I finally reached the monastery at dusk.

A narrow, steep road leads to the monastery atop a mountain. The monastery is large, but few people were there at dusk. I asked a few monks if they had seen a Mongghul nun. No one had because Mother didn't leave her room during the day. Finally, a monk pointed to a temple and said, "Go there. A nun is there."

I walked into the temple and heard a sewing machine clicking. I walked toward the sound and saw a woman busily sewing in a temple corner. She was

alone. I began sobbing without seeing her face clearly, though crying is prohibited in Tibetan monasteries. Mother was shocked, slowly stood, and burst out crying.

Though she had adapted to her nun life, I didn't want Mother to live alone, far from our homeland. I persuaded her to return. She finally agreed, but we first finished her uncompleted sewing work.

After staying some days in my brother's and my homes, she wanted to leave because villagers, relatives, and others gossiped about her wearing a cassock and her nun identity. According to Mongghul custom, nuns and monks should live in a monastery or a nunnery, not stay in their village home. Confused about where she should live, she regretted leaving Hualong County.

She then went on a month-long retreat in a cave near Ruachuari Monastery and then returned to Xiaqiong Monastery and continued her sewing work.

Two years later, she left Xiaqiong and went to Rgulang Monastery, where she rented a house in Gumang Village (near Rgulang Monastery) and studied scriptures for five years.

MOTHER'S LIFE IN OUR HOMETOWN

In 2017, relatives from Maqang Village, Wushi Town, replaced their old wooden living quarters with a new two-story concrete building. The old wooden rooms were considered outdated and could not be sold for a high price. Two-story concrete buildings were preferred after 2010, so these relatives gave Mother wood from four wooden rooms for free. We then built four rooms in Zhalang near Rgulang Monastery, where I used to camp and herd cattle, sheep, and horses when I was younger. It takes more than an hour from the nearest road to walk along a narrow winding trail inaccessible to vehicles to Mother's place.

There are three or four young Mongghul nuns at a nunnery subordinate to Labrang Monastery in Xiahe [Gannan], but there were no old nuns like Mother in 2020 in the Mongghul areas. Mother thus became a respected senior nun in the Mongghul area.

MY NECKLACE

Mother gave me some of her old adornments as a dowry on the night of my tulighui juuligha ritual. She put the necklace around my neck, helped me put on her old earrings, and said, "You will stay home with us. These adornments now belong to

you."

I later wore them during festivals, weddings, and other cultural events. They were too heavy to wear when I did fieldwork. They made my neck and ears uncomfortable, particularly when I was sweating.

Necklaces and earrings are Mongghul women's most valuable possessions. Some components of this necklace have been passed down through my maternal lineage for generations. Still, most were accumulated through shop purchases and work done by local silversmiths.

I wore this heavy necklace for two years after Mother gave it to me and then replaced it with a modern light one and small adornments I bought from a shop in Weiyuan. Since then, I have rarely worn the old heavy necklace except during important events such as love song meetings, weddings, and large religious rituals. I replaced my large, heavy silver earrings with small light ones. The old heavy ones enlarged my earlobe piercings, pulled my earlobes down, and caused pain. I bought several necklaces and earrings from shops in the following years.

I have worn various necklaces. If a woman doesn't wear adornments, her husband will suffer from diseases like facial paralysis and strokes, which is one reason I wear adornments.

My traditional adornments are precious to me, and I have carefully kept them. I will always cherish them as gifts from Mother. Such adornments are very precious to Mongghul and Tibetan women. Such precious adornments as these traditional items will not be made in the future. They should eventually have been given to my younger brother's wife. However, they finally came to me because I stayed home as tulighui juuligha. My sagging big earlobe holes indicate how often I wear them.

I will give these adornments to my daughter-in-law if she wants to wear them. If not, they will be stored at home as a treasure. Once I received these adornments from Mother, I never lent them to anyone. They will belong to my son and daughter-in-law and be passed on to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren in time.

My daughter-in-law prefers modern gold jewelry. Today, no one is interested in this old, heavy necklace and earrings that are not modern and fashionable. Old heavy adornments are considered too tight around the neck, even making breathing difficult. I feel my neck has become shorter since I didn't wear this necklace for more than ten years.

In the past, people often wore long robes, silver earrings, and necklaces on every occasion – special or not. Mongghul women enjoy showing off their

expensive adornments. Today, people would say these adornments are outdated and not worth wearing.

Poor people wore yellow porcelain bead necklaces, protecting their necks from the wind.

MY CLEFT LIP

There was a bumper potato harvest during the production team time in my village in 1967. I was born a year after a production team dug a couple of cellars behind my ancestral graveyard, where harvested potatoes were stored.¹

A cleft lip was unknown among my direct ancestors. My maternal uncle's wife, Qijangkari (1948-2009), was a pretty but wicked Mongghul woman. She was frightened when she first saw me and whooped, "Our Zhinyahua has given birth to a monster!"

She wrapped me in a sleeveless short woolen gown and put me in the corner of a bed to starve.

My family and others in our village had never seen a baby with a cleft lip. They were curious and amazed. Three days after being discarded, Mother checked and found frost [from my breath] on the woolen clothes near my mouth that signaled I was still alive. She took me in her arms and nursed me as is a mother's duty.

In 1971, medical treatment for a cleft lip was unavailable. The gap in my lip widened as I grew older. Mother worried and took me to a village clinic where the village doctor sewed the two parts of the cleft lip without anesthesia and without cutting normal soft tissue on both sides. I cried and struggled in great pain. The wound was soon swollen and painful, and eating was difficult. I cried from the swelling and pain. Eventually, a suture broke, and part of the wound reopened. My family never took me to a hospital.

After I married, my husband said worriedly, "You will soon give birth. What shall we do if the baby has a cleft lip like you?"

I'm a happy person, and I like to laugh. My former husband said, "Please don't laugh. What shall we do if your cleft lip splits again?"

I replied, "What's wrong with me? I know you're handsome, and I'm ugly, but I can take good care of your home, give birth, take care of the children, and do farm work. What is my shortcoming? If you think I'm incompetent, please find

¹ Mongghul believe children may be adversely affected by what happens to a family's ancestral graves.

another pretty wife! "

CONCLUSION

After 2000, people preferred modern gold necklaces. Few wear traditional jewelry of coral, turquoise, agate, and silver plates in the Mongghul areas. When a bride is about to marry, the groom is expected to provide a gold necklace, a pair of gold earrings, and a gold bracelet. The new couple, with representatives of both the groom and bride, visit gold shops in Weiyuan Town or Xining City and buy gold necklaces. More and more antique dealers collect old jewelry from Mongghul villages. Many women sell their traditional jewelry to dealers at a low price because they believe Mongghul jewelry is old-fashioned and outdated.

Tayinsuu has carefully kept her jewelry. This is unusual among Mongghul women. In 2020, when I interviewed her in her home, Tayinsuu wore a simple string of old coral, turquoise, agate, and porcelain beads around her neck.

Why does she keep her traditional adornments and wear a simple, traditional necklace? Here is her answer:

I wear this simple traditional necklace because I'm getting old and don't have much time left in this world. Wearing these traditional beads means I don't forget our traditional customs. Wearing it also looks nice.

We shouldn't forget our Mongghul Khan's¹ customs. That's the reason I wear it. Wearing it protects me from wind and prevents facial paralysis and serious diseases such as cerebral hemorrhage and cerebral infarction. Furthermore, wearing a necklace protects my neck from exposure. I'm very traditional and feel shy about exposing my neck.

¹ "Mongghul Khan" appears in a song (see Limusishiden et al. 2021:15) known to a decreasing number of Huzhu Mongghul in 2022.

PHOTOGRAPHS

FIG 10. Zhinyahua's rooms under construction on Zhalang Mountain (20 April 2020, Tayinsuu).



FIG 11. Zhinyahua's rooms under construction on Zhalang Mountain (20 April 2020, Tayinsuu).



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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Chapu 查甫, tsha phug ཅུ་ཕུག་ Township

chi, a protruding round dot on adornments

Danjanshang, bstan rgyal hrang བསྐན་རྒྱལ་མར་ a person's name
diudiuri, embroidered pocket-cover

Dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལགས།

Donggou 东沟 Township

Dongshan 东山 Township

Duguasirang, sgrol dkar tshe ring སྒྲལ་དཀར་ཅེ་རིང་ a person's name

Durijidanzhu, rdo rje don grub རྩེ་དོན་བུ་ a person's name

Durijizhankari, rdo rje sgron dkar རྩེ་སྒྲོན་དཀར་ a person's name

Durijizhunmaa, rdo rje sgrol ma རྩེ་སྒྲལ་མ། a person's name

Gannan 甘南, kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Gansu 甘肃 Province

Gantan 甘滩 Village

Gaozhai 高寨 Town

giibii, three layers of cotton cloth glued together, creating a stable
sewing base with new cotton cloth for the top layer and old
cotton cloth for the bottom two layers

gser byu གཤེར་བྱུ་ golden coral, amber

Gumang, Guomang 郭莽, go mang ལྷོ་མང་ Village

Haibei 海北, mtsho byang མཚོ་བྱང་ Prefecture

Haidong 海东 City

Hainan 海南, mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Han 汉, an ethnic group in China

hgaïja, traditional necklace; mgul rgyan མགུལ་རྒྱན་ necklace

hindazi, QC, hanta 汗褸 white shirt

Hongyazigou 红崖子沟 Township

Huaguarixja, dpal mkhar rgyal དཔལ་མཁར་རྒྱལ་ a person's name

Hualong 化隆 Hui 回 Autonomous County

Huangnan 黄南 rma lho རྩ་ལོ་ Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

Huangzhong 湟中 sku 'bum སུ་འབུ་ County

Hui 回, an Islamic ethnic group in China

Huzhu 互助 Mongghul (Tu 土) Autonomous County

Jangja, Zhangjia 张家 Village

Jianzha 尖扎, gcan tsha གཅན་ཅཱ་ County

Jiase 嘉色; rgyal sras རྒྱལ་སྐྱལ་ reincarnate *bla ma*

Jughuari, Zhuoke 卓科 Village

Labrang, Labuleng 拉卜楞, bla brang ལྷ་བླང་།

Langjia 浪加, gling rgyal གླིང་རྒྱལ་ Village

Limusishiden, Li Dechun 李得春, klu 'bum tshe brtan

ལྷ་འབུ་ཙེ་བདུན་། a person's name

manog, *manog M mana*, *manan*, *manughu* (pronounced *manuu*); Ch *manao* 瑪瑙, agate

Maqang, Majuan 马圈 Village

mengu hgaija, silver plates with coral, agate, turquoise, and porcelain or pearl beads; *mengu* = M *mönggü*/n (dialectally pronounced *menggu* or *munggu*) silver

Ming 明 Dynasty

Mongghul, Monguor, Mangghuer, Tu 土

Ping'an 平安 Region

Pinyin 拼音

purghan, a deity represented in a sedan or a cloth-covered pole held by four men or a single man, respectively

Qaaghuali, Chaergou 岔儿沟 Village

Qijangkari, chos skyong mkhar ཚོས་སྐྱོང་མཁར་། a person's name

Qinghai 青海, mtsho sngon མཚོ་ཐོག་ Province

Rdangyan, Dongyuan 东元 Village

Rgulang, dgon lung byams pa gling དགོན་ལུང་བུ་མཆོག་།; Youningsi 佑宁寺, a monastery's name

Rnqanzhaxi, rin chen bkra shis རིན་ཆེན་བརྒྱ་མཁའ་། a person's name

Rnsan, a person's name

Ruachuari, rgyal sras ri khrod རྒྱལ་སྐྱལ་རི་ཁྲོད་། C, Tianmensi 天门寺 *saimiin*, gold-silver mixture

Salar, Sala 撒拉, an ethnic group in China

Sangdang 桑当 Township

shan, sran སྒན། otter fur

Shgeayili, Dazhuang 大庄 Village

Sitan 寺滩 Village

skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།

Smee, Ximi 西米 Village

spos byu སྐལ་བུ་ amber coral

spos she སྐལ་ཤེལ་ amber

suuga, silver earrings for women, M *süike* or *süikü* (today pronounced *suix* or *siix*)

Tayinsuu, a person's name

Tongren 同仁 County

tulighui juuligha, a ritual for a woman who remains in her parents' home, has lovers, and bears children

wajog, porcelain

Wanli 万历

Weiyuan 威远 Town

Wushi 五十 Town

Xiahe 夏河, bsang chu བསང་ཆུ། County

Xiaqiong 夏琼 bya khyung བྱ་ཆུང་། Monastery

Xinghai 兴海, brag dkar བླ་དཀར། County

Xining 西宁, zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

xra wajog, yellow porcelain; *xra wajog*, yellow porcelain; *xra* = Mongolian *shira* 'yellow', Proto-Mongolic **sira* and Written Mongol <*sira*>

xriga string of pearls or porcelain; M *erike/n* string of prayer beads, originally probably **xerike*

xuang koldii suuga, *xuang koldii suuga* = Ch shuang 雙 + M köl-tei 'with foot' + M *süike* (as above), double foot earrings

Xunhua 循化 Salar (Sala 撒拉) County

xuri, M *shürü*, also written *sirü*; byu ru བྱུ་རུ། coral

Zanghgua, Sangshige 桑士哥 Village

Zhahgai Baizang (Saizongsi 赛宗寺), brag dkar sprel rdzong བླ་དཀར་སྤྲེལ་རྩོད་། Monastery

Zhalang, a place name

Zhanggaga, a person's name

Zhinyahua, a person's name

Zhoka Naka, brag gi sna kha བླ་གི་སྐ་མ་། a place name

TAYINSUUNI DANGMANI HGAJJA DA QINSANGNIINI NANTARI

Limusishiden (Qinhai Deedi Surighuali Dighasan Smankang)*

GAQANNIINI DOGLA

Tayinsuu (1968 fandi turaja), Mongghul, ghuran bulaini aamana. Ne Dunda Lusni, Kugua Noori Snni, Huzhuu Mongghul Njeena Dolagu Xanni Jughuari Ayilidigu yiringa. Turaji bosa huhuunga; jina ayilini mula surighualira tawun fan pujiu muxija; mulani sghuudi ghadadi kashida aasi dilaja. Zhinyahua (1950 fandi turaja), Tayinsuuni aamana, gan Tayinsuudi ne hgaija suugahgina sanglidi ghuja. Ne pujiura Tayinsuuni kuduguniini guleji, hgaija suuganiini, darang Tayinsuuni aamani aagu lama lasani jiuriwa. Ne 2020 fanni Ghoori Sarani 29di bu Tayinsuuni kuduni xji ganla tangxalaji, ne pujiuni jiuri burawa.

SOG WUYE

Mongghul nine kun nantari, aagu lama, Mongghul hgaija suuga, Mongghul loriji

MUXIGU UGO

Nengi pujiura, Mongghul yirihgi dangma baidirana juujinhgini jiuriwa. Tayinsuu (1968 fandi turaja), Mongghulwa, ghuran bulaini aamana, ne Dunda Lusni, Kugua Noori Snni, Huzhuu Mongghul Njeena Dolagu Xanni Jughuari Ayilidigu kunna. Turaji bosa huhuunga; jina ayilini mula surighualira tawun fan pujiu muxija; mula sghuudi ghadadi kashida aasi dilaja. Zhinyahua (1950 fandi turaja), Tayinsuuni aamana. Gan Tayinsuudi ne hgaija suugahgina sanglidi ghuja. Ne piura Tayinsuuni kuduguniini guleji, hgaijaniini jiuriwa. Tayinsuuni aamani aagu lama lasani ye jiuriwa. Ne 2020 fanni Ghoori Sarani 29di, bu Tayinsuuni kuduni xji, ganla tangxala ne pujiuni jiuri buraghawa.

Pujiura Tayinsuu da Zhinyahuani awusan srinhginiini gharighawa. Guura darang hgaija, suuga da deelhgini awusan

* Limusishiden. 2023. Tayinsuuni Dangmani Hgaija da qinsangniini Nantari. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:201-218.

srinniini ye gharighawa. Zhinyahua da Tayinsuuni lasan adalniini, Tayinsuu ne Hualun ghajarishdi aamana yerisanni, Zhinyahua jina ghajarishdina amagiji adal lasanni, Tayinsuu jina hgaijana kilesanni,arang Tayinsuuni huhuuniini jiuriwa.

TAYINSUU DA ZHINYAHUANI AWUSAN SRINHGINI

TOG 1. Tayinsuu diidangma hgaija da suugana juuja, jighaniini shan arasila yuuja. Gan alog diudiudii deel musija (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di).



TOG 2. Zhinyahua jinani (Tayinsuu, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 20di).



TOG 3. Tayinsuuni dangmani hgaija (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di). (1) xuri, (2) aiya, (3) manog, (4) saimiin hariga, (5) mengu paizi, (6) chi.



TOG 4. Tayinsuuni fulaan xuri hariga (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di).



TOG 5. Tayinsuuni xra xuri hariga (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di).



TOG 6. Tayinsuuni xuri da wajog hariga (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di).



TOG 7. Tayinsuuni xuang koldii suuga (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di). Nige suugara ghoori xuri hariga da ghoori mengu szaribawa. (1) xuri hariga, (2) aiya hariga, (3) manog hariga. Lailasan yiiguala wajog harigawa.



TOG 8 da 9. Tayinsuu huina awusan suuga (Jugui, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 27di). Nehgini mengula szasanni puja timuriwa, turagu xuri, aiya puja, suleola szasanna.



TOG 10. Zhinyahuani Zhalang Ghadara warijin muudi gerni (Tayinsuu, 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 2odi).



TOG 11. Zhinyahuani Zhalang Ghadara warijin muudi gerni (Tayinsuu 2020 fanni Deeran Sarani 20di).



Dangmani Mongghul yirihgini juudalini: mengu suuga; diidangmani basira xuri, manog, aiya, wajog, szari mengula wara juujin hgaija; shdasira chuala giisan lama xixi, wajog hariga;arang mengu paizira xuri, manog, aiya, wajog da lama xixi harigahgila szasanhgiwa.

Mongghul ghajarishdi xjunhgi ghada ghaxji yiri danglala yii sza, kuduna sowa aaba aamahgilana handi sosa, yiisge ne hgaija da suuga gharishdini tuarilana. Tayinsuu kuduna sojiigula, ganni gharishdini tuarilaja. Xjunhgini kurigeesza liuhanniini qinsangsani juudali szaji, awuji juughana.

Zhinyahuadi ghuman mengu paizi hgaija yiina. Nigeniini ayilini purghandi fulaxja, Tayinsuudi nigeniini ghuja, nigeniini Tayinsuuni aamani jina hura giija. Fan xangi, Tayinsuuni teragu nijeeri hariga dola bo rjajida gan gualan gua, juun guigula.

TAYINSUUNNI ADAL

Budahgini ayilini mula surighualira tawun fan pujiu muxiwa, dii kudu nanhanghula pujiu muxi shdaji gui, kuduna sowa kashida aasi diladiwa. Kudugu, ghadagu lisigani wariwa, mangda dii nigijji surisan Qidari pujiuni mashidaxja. Ne kidi fanla, ne wiixinni yanglangi dii jangna jangna Qidari pujiuni sangdi yang nigijji

suriwa. Ghada jangjiu hula moori gharisa banchai tirigani rjeji gharigha shdanni, moluu anji yiiguni mude shdani. Bu darang Qidarila jina nirana jiuri shdani. Wiixinlaga kunhgini biiki, Qidari pujiuni suridii shdana, pujiuna jiuriji falasa. Wiixin hanaladi yangchu hudu shgewa.

Mulani sghuudi muni aajiu aanee, bu jina, darang guura kun kidila, ghadadi guri dalaji haran-ghoori aasi, ghoori jige, nige mori dilawa. Huina bu beeri dangla, dii ndani liuhan budaghula raiqileji dilawa. Muni aaba kenniha bu yii mudeni, muni aama, muni shdaariwa, kuduna tulighui juugha sosan xjunna.

Muni aamani huidi aabani Huaguarixja (~1913~1993) dodana, gan Rgulang lamalija. Gandi diungi yiina kudu soja. Tinga dii nda kurigeeji gua, kudu soghaja. Ne 1958 fandi, Huaguarixjani Rgulangsa kuduna rghaxja, sowa huina, ne 1978 fandi yang sangdi Rgulangdina lamalala gharixja. Ne jiurani diulana handiladi soja. Huaguarixja muni diuni, Rnqanzhaxi (1971 fandi turaja) dura Rgulang gharixja, lama lighaxja, te fan Rnqanzhaxi niiman nesiwa. Tinga dii bu kudu soja, yiri danglala xji gua. Huina muni diu lola kudu hari rja, kudu sowa beeri awaxja.

Muni aajiu aaneeni Zhanggaga (1914-1986) dodana, ganni harinangni Fulaan Nara Jangjana. Gan ndani aadeedi yiri danglala rgunsu muxi, ne Zanghguadi yiri lija. Muxigu liuhanlana saini guiwa, gan guaiji ndani aadeedi yiri danglala rja, ndirii rangi ghuran bulai turaja. Ndani naghai da beeri ghoorilana, ndani aadeedi saini gua, dii ndani aamadi kileguni, qi kudu aaneeni rje so, yiridi bii xi. Huina dii ayilini shduguhgi kuji gharigha aama da diu ghoorilana nige rmaara daleng soja. Ahangi fanla, dii Aama xni rmaangi pughaja, aaneela handiladi soja, dii huinaha aanee guiraxja.

Aanee da Aama ghoorila caifin wari shdana, gan ghoorila darang Tiiwari gule shdana, Tiiwari pujiunida jiuri shdana.

Bu dolidila Huangzhun da Hualun ghoori ghajarishdingi xja. Bu Kugua Noori Snsa ghada ghari shdaji gua.

Ne 1986 fandi, nda tulighui juughaja, kudu soxja. Jarin fanni huina, nda wariwalangi Fulaan Nara ghajarishdi Diura Ayilidi, Danjanshang (1964-1989) dodanjin tigii nenqangmama tigii Tiiwarigidi beeri danglawa. Danjanshangni aaba aamani guilisanni shdewa, gan jiu ghoori xjundiu da diu nigelana handi adal lana.

Danjanshangni kuduni dii yixida nanhanghula adal lagu log guaha xjundiu da diuhgina dura ndani kudu sola rja. Danjanshang Tiiwari gule shdana, ndani kudu sowa dii Mongghulni yanglanaya gulen gua, jiisi Qidarila gulena.

Danjanshang baini durigi, gansannamawa, durasidi hudu muuninga, wuqidiigisa duri suanni gui wuqina. Gandi fiiijihai nari yiina, saa gharidii gisa, moliiragu kunusizina cakiji shdan gua. Buda ghoorila handiladi jirighun fanla, dii huguxja ne narilanaga.

Gan guilasan te fandi, muni shge bulai, Durijidanzhu (1985 fandi turaja) jirighuhanna; ghuaidari bulai, Durijizhunmaa (1987 fandi turaja) deeranhanna; ghurandari bulai, Durijizhankari (1989 fandi turaja) kiilendi ruguja.

Danjanshang huguangi, dii ganni ghoori xjiudiunida da diu ghuranlani yang Diura kuduna gharixja, ganhgida shgelija, jinana dola shdanaha.

Danjanshang huguangi ghuran fanlaxja, ayilini kungi niraniini Jirasirang (1963 fandi turaja) dodana. Kuduni nenqang yiigula yiri awu shdaji gua, gan nda gandii yiridi ragina. Kunni zhunzhuuwa, dunda surighualingira pujiu muxija. Bu gandii szaghawa, "Nda ghuran bulai yii, qi nehgini jirihga yidiji ndala handi shgedighaguniu?"

Gan liguna gina, dii bu ghuran bulaina dura ganni kuduni adal lala xjiwaya, bulaihgi huinaha ye shgeda kun chinlaxja.

Muni bulaihgi dunda surighualisa muxa ghari, dii yiiguala muxiji gua, kudu kashida aasi dilaja. Te sghuudi Aama ne Hualun ghajarishdi Tiiwari surijiigu, dii muni kuuni Durijidanzhuni, kilewa Janza Xanra tigii jina niisan surighualingira Tiiwari pujiu surila xghaja. Te surighualini niraniini Zhoka Nada dodana. Bu ne surighuali anjiini yiiha tuuxii yii mudeni. Aama jina Tiiwari surijiigula muulasa ne Tiiwari pujiu tusa shgewaga, dii Durijidanzhuni kurigee muxila xghaja.

Ghuran fan muxa ghari, Durijidanzhu tigii malii wuile yeri shdaji gua, gan jiu Haidun Bazarini Piinnan Xanra lisiga warila xja. Tiriisa gan Tiiwari xjungi tannija. Te xjun Raihguang ghajarini Langjagiji tigii ayiligrasara rsanna. Awa ndani kudu ra kuudi beeri dangla soja.

Muni shge xjun, Durijizhunmaa ne Haliqi rogni Shgeayilidi

kurigeediwa, tirii beeri danglaja. Mula xjun, Durijizhankari Gozai tigii ghajarigidi yiri danglala gharixja.

MUNI AAMA, ZHINYAHUA

Aama tijin-shzin nesirana dii lamalaxja. Gan tulighui juugha kuduna soghasan xjunna. Jinani aawu, Rnsan (1943 fandi turaja), aajii, Duguasirang (~1946 - ~2019) ghuranla handiladi soji shgelija. Huina shgelangi, Duguasirangni Naringhuali Qaaghuali Ayilidi yirilija. Aama ghada xni rmaangi pugha, banka ghari ra soxja, naghai huuqin rmaara soja.

Rnqanzhaxi da bugiji, Aamadi ghoori bulai yiina. Aama danbiiqiidi darishiba hudungi shgewa, gan turangni Rdangyan Ayilini badiingini tadasani Tiiwari surija. Gan guadundi tulighui muriguji hguaiqa muxina.

Aama tijin-shzin nesirana, ne Kugua Noori Snni, Hainan ghajarini, Zhahgai Baizang Rgunbaara jalalaxja. Xangi, te ghajarini gan hudungi duralaja, dii gan tirii sowaxja. Gan budahgidi kenmanmadi mudeghaji gui gharixja.

Tirii sowangi, niguudurini te rgunbaaragu shge lamangi Aamani sga kileguni qi aagu lama ladiikija. Aama muulaguni, "Nda liuhan gua, mulasla shgelija. Kun ne hara ghajarishdini adal lasada jiu tigii loggaba," tinga dii gan aagu lama laxja, zanni musaxja. Tirii seerila gergi yera, guura aagu lamangi ghoorila handiladi soja. Niuduri malangha gan darang zanna musi soja.

Niguudurini sojiha, te rgunbaarasa jisuurasan denhuangi budahgidi rja, kileguni budahgini maliimama te rgunbaara nige ragina. Ne szanbogdi budahgi yiisge mudewa, Aama tirii rua soja. Muni diu da liuhan ghoorila shuufuna kaiga malii tirii rjela xa, Aamani sgaja. Rjesa Aama sghanlawabai zangi musa soja, narilasan kunla yii salidanibai, denhuara jisuurasan kilegula nigijjida salidan gua.

Rnqanzhaxi niguuadi sghuuxja Aamani, "Qimu rjesa sghanlawa. Qi nigijjida narilaja gua! Qi bulaihgidina yiida mudegha lamalasza! Qi yandini ndahgidi denhua pughaghani?"

Dii Aama gan ghoorini digha handi kudu hari rja.

Rgulang Rgunbaa dide lamani rgunbaanga. Mongghul

ghajarishdi aagu lama rgunbaa gua. Aamadi xgu ghajari gua, huaqana muxiji adal lagu log gua. Ndani kudu kidiuduri sowa, dii ndani diuni kuduni sola gharixja. Jiu ningiji ayilidi nige fan soja.

Huina nige qinjira, Aama kudusa yiuwaxja, kenmanmadi mudeghaji gui. Gan ne Hualun Xan ghajarini Xaqun Rgunbaara kuriya. Tirii gan jinadina baghaxi lamadiingi yerija, Aamadi huaqana surighaja. Aama deel yuu shdannaha gan rgunbaaragu purghanhgidi deel yuuja. Kidi sara dawa, ganni baghaxini ugoni qangla gan ghada tulighuira hugusan kunni ruuni rguaridi rdeghajin ghajarishdi can sola gharixja.

Ne Gansu Snni Xahuu ghajarishdi, Kugua Noori Snni Xunhua, Hualun, Janza, Tunrin, Huangzhun ndiriilang ghuran fan guri, yuudangra soji, manii muxiji can soja.

Hugusan ruuni rguaridi rdeghajin ghajarishdi, gan kadan, mughui, pudog mudog, yiile yansada ayiji gua. Jiu ningiji gan 108 ula tulighuindi rgaigijin ghajarishdi gurina dalaji soji, manii muxiji, can soja. Ahangi duriligu yiuwa yang nige ghada tulighuindi rgaigijin ghajari tada xja, jiu ningiji ghuran fanlija.

Tadadidugu kunhgi Aamani guriini kurigeeji ghugu, rdegu wuqugu kurigeeji rgu, Aamadi hudu saina. Ganhgi mudena, ghada tulighuindi rgai gijin ghajarishdi, tindiixi kajang guini hugusan kunni yiile, pudog mudog jirihgara Aama huaqana muxisa, ganni qiini yuuhuada kujiligha shdana. Darang tiriini huaqana muxisa, ne hugusan kundi kuji gharighaji qighaan moori niiji ghuana. Rguarihgida Aamasa ayin gua, Aama kijeeda lailasan nuasizahgini tehgidi rdeghagu, darang amangiha ne kun ruuni qaxjiji xoeshidaghaji rguarihgidi tijeena.

Jiu ningiji dawaji ra, dii Aama yansada ayin gua, xjonala lawog ghajarishdi sogu duralana.

Nigehuini, hudu haranghua tigii suaningidi, tingereni fuudi aloggi la soja. Aama mula guri muxina jaxjui pugha ghajarishdi soji manii muxiniiha, lurijogdi shge kadangi, ganni muxi roghgu ghada jurirasa ganni rje soja, darang tingereshdiji moorilanna. Sghuu yiisza yang nige kadan Aamani sulighui rogshdini kuriya, dii nigijijha ghurandari kadan Aamani warang rogshdini kurixja. Ghuran kadan Aamani nudule soja. Aama gualanda gua, maniina muxina. Rjesa Aama ghudiligu kamada guaha, kadanhgi Aamani

wiikadija, dii nige nige Aamani tulighui jighadini duuli duwaxja. Aama darang nigiiijida ayin gua, gualanda gua, te shdaari maniina muxina.

Kadanhgi ghajarishdi kidiiwa yang Aamani nudule soja. Lurijogdi nige kadanni yang diula puzi ra, Aamani turigua gurulixja. Aama darang maniina muxina, sgaa soja, kadan ganni rdediikiji. Gan muha baina te luasa ghalijiurasan kadanhgidi rdeghadiyagija. Sgaaji rdela ragisada rji gua, sgaa sosada rdela ran gua, kadanhggi ghajarishdi kidiiwa Aamani nudule soja. Ne sghuudi jona wuqiina, tingerera gigeengila rja, kadanhggi puza rja, jona huladiji ghari yiuxja. Aamani rdeji gua.

Darang nighuini, halangnama tigii yerigini xruudini, Aama ghada tulighuindi ula ghajarishdi rgai gijin tigii ghajarigidi yuudanggira manii muxiji can sojiiha, shgemama tigii ghoori mughui suuraji ganni yuudang ude muxini kurija, mughui ghoorila huaiqa sunisiniigu tigii ghudilin gua. Dii turaji ruaji rji gua. Muulasa gan ruaji ra, Aamani rdedikua giwa, tingiji gua, nigejangla, dii yang suura nige rogshdi gharixja.

Ne ghada tulighuindi rgai gijin ghajarishdi ghuran fan qii suriwa, Aama yang ne Xaqun Rgunbaara hariji ra, hgalaszan tigii raqoggi tura sowa, rgunbaaragu purghanhgidi deel xuuxja. Gan lamadii baghaxina tadasani qii surija, ghadagu kunla handilaguni quunna. Durila gan deel xuuna, suanidundi ghada szarisa szu ruguja.

Aama ayilisa ghara xi, dii bu yamada sunishidaji gua, muulasa Aama huguxja giwa.

AAMANI HUALUN XANDI YERILA XWA

Niguudurini bu mangdaji ayilini kungidi rmaa pughaniiha, Smee Ayilini kungi jang ne Xaqun Rgunbaasa jalaji rja, gan muni tada ra kilena, Aamama nda ugo dailaji rja, gan jiu Xaqun Rgunbaara yiikiji. Bu yixi baisangi gharishdigu lisigana hgalaji giwa, kudugu kundina yiida kile Hualun ghajarishdiji yiudiwa.

Turangni bu Piinnan kuriwa. Bu jiu Xaqun amagiji yiuguni nigiiijida yii mudeni, tadadidugu kunhgidi szaghawa, dii banchai tirigangira sodiwa. Tiriga kaikinjin Capukiji tigii ghajarigidi kura

nda boghadiwa. Yang mula tigii banchai tirigangira sowa, madaji sza bu te rgunbaara kurixja.

Yiutan darang murii snburii tigii moorigiri yiuwa ghada tulighuingidi kuriya. Shgemama rgunbaanga, haranghuadi kuja kun quuguandaxja. Lamadii kididi szaghawa tehgi Mongghul aagu lamamangi sgawu guigisa nigeda sgaji guigina. Kog gua, Aama durila ghada gharin gua, hana muden gua. Huinaha lamadiingi hurilana quukiji rjegahana, "Teetirii xda aagu lamangi yiina."

Bu rgunbaara jona rua xwa, qanglaji finrinjiini hgarigi dangghudina. Bu dangtijin tirii jona yiuji sza, bulanggidini yiringi deel xuuna, gan xjonalawa. Bu ganni niuri qirainiinida yii sga, kuja ulaadiwa, rgunbaa tura kundi ulaanghan guajida. Ulaajin hgarini sunishida, Aamani nige ayighaji ghuja, jona ruansana puzira, ninpusina hura shdaji gui ulaaxja, nda sgangi.

Aama aagu lamalaxjabai, bu ganni ne ghajarishdi xjonala soghagu yii duralani, kudusa yixida hulaghula. Dii bu gandi kileguni kudu hariya. Huina dii ganda dayanglaja, buda ghoorila buragha adasan xuujin lisigani buragha handi kudi hariwa.

Ndani diuni kuduni, ndani kudu ahang duri sowa, Aama dii sogu duralaja gua, amaxja gisa rog turog, ayilini kun xashipa pughaguni, aagu lamala, zanna musa jiisi kuduna rua soja ga. Mongghul kunni logha lamadii, aagu lamahgi, lamaladigu dii ayilidina soguni puja rgunbaadi sosa ninba. Sogu ghajari yii ra, Aamada langjograxja Hualunsa hari rwaga.

Dii gan Ruachuari Rgunbaa tadagu yuudanggira nige sara can soja. Buragha, gan yang Xaqun Rgunbaara gharixja, tirii yang purghanhgidi deel xuuja.

Ghoori fan dawaxja, Aama yang Xaqun Rgunbaasa yiuwaxja, hariwa rja. Ne Gumangra qinsanggi seerila rdemla soja. Rgulang Rgunbaa tadadidudi, tirii, gan jiisi tawun fan manii muxiji soja.

AAMANI BUDANGHULANI NDIRII SOWANGI LASAN ADAL

Ne 2017ni fandi, ndani Maqangni roggudugu muudi gerna dara ghoori sangni yangshihuini ger waridija. Darisan muudi gerni hanala yanglan gua, dalidisada shge nemgi gharighan gua. Ne 2010 fansa huina, kenda ghoori sang yangshihuini ger warina, tinga

darisan muudi gerniini xghagu ghajari gua. Tinga, ne rog jiu deeran jen muudi gerna Aamadi arangla ghuja, jinadina sojin ger puzighala xgiji. Budahgi mulani sghuudi kashida aasi dilasan te Rgulang Rgunbaa tadagu, Zhalang Ghadara puzighadiwa. Narin tigii kun yiusan moorigira mula tirigada yiuwa tirii kuri shdana. Tadagu shge moorirasa Zhalangra yiusa, nige zhuntuudi kuridii shdana.

Mongghul ghajarishdi niuduri malang ghuran deeran aagu lama yiina, ganhgi ne Gansu Snni Xahuuni Larang Rgunbaani aagu lama rgunbaa tindiixiwa. Do 2020 fandi, Aamani tigii nesidii aagu lama dii budanghulani Mongghul ghajarishdi sgaguni guiraxja.

MUNI HGAIJA

Nda tulighui juughasan te suani, Aama nda gan jina juusan juudalihgina nda sanglidi ghuja. Aama hgaijana muni gujira tiighua, huuqin boyin suugana muni qigira juugha kilena, "Qi budahgila handi soguna. Ne juudalihgini qimu ghuya."

Dii bu ghusan juudalihgini jiixiari, yiri awujin xjun kurigeejinrhang, darang luan kun handiladigura juuwa. Lisiga warigu sghuudini juusa kundunghula hguaiwa. Muni guji da qigihgi xjiribu gua, kunisizi gharisa caihuada.

Hgaija suugahgi, Mongghul yirihgini hudu lamanqan jinani dangxiwa. Nehgini diidangmasa Aamani rogshdi chuanki bo rsanna, kidi gusailiwaha ken mudejii? Nehgini dalidijin ghajarisa awugu, menguqihgidi janqighagugiji nige nige huraji boji rsanna.

Bu Aama ghusanni kundun juudalini ghoori fan juuwa dii Wuuzindi xangi mula kunguan, dogu logshdiingi awuwa. Tinga dii bu kundun diidangmani te juudalini, hudu gaqan jiixia yinganrhang pujiha dii juuji gui. Bu suuganada raliijidiwa, mula kunguan tigii suugangi awuwa. Te huuqin suuga muni qigi laxjini duraji qidawa, qigi nukuani shgedigha, darang yidighana. Huinagu kidi fandini bu yang kidi hgaija suuga awuji juuwa.

Bu amahgii hgaijada juuwa. Kileguni Mongghul yirihgi juudali yii juusa liuhanhgidi saini gua gina, kii niujin nari tuarilana gina. Tinga bu hgaija juunii.

Nda kilesa muni ne diidangmani juudalihgi hudu gaqanna, tinga bu sghangi hura giijii. Dii nigea, Aama nda ghusanna, bu

hudu hairanlanii. Ne sanba juudali Mongghul Tiiwari yirihgidi hudu hudungi gaqanna. Tigii diidangmani juudalini nansa huina dii guira xguna, szajin gua, juujinda gua. Nankamaha, nehgi ndani diuni yiridini tuarilasa ninba. Nda kudu soghajiigu dii nda tuarilaxja. Muni qigi laxjini rjeda jiu muden bu neni kidingi juuwaha, qigi laxjini duraji qida shgedighaxja.

Bu nansa huina nehgini muni kuu yiridi ghugunii, gan juugu duralasa. Gan juugu yii duralasa, dii jiu kudu bowushdari hura giiguna. Aama nda ghuwa, bu kenmanmandida asighuaji ghuji gui. Nehgini nansa huina, dii muni kuu da kuu yirihgi, muni sunzihgidi chuangsinghidi ghua bo xguna.

Bu ne nige gusaira sain niizhang rjewa, liiamin muunighula. Kuu yiri gan dogu szari juudalini juugu duralana. Niuduri malang ne diidangmani kudun hgaija da suugani juujin gua, juusa hana muu kileguna. Diidangmani hgaija gujini wiika qirogghula wuurinada gharigha adagu tigii loggi yiina. Muni te huuqin hgaijani yii juuwa haran fanlaxja, muulasa gujida hguaridaszan tigiinga.

Dangmaha kunhgi kijeeni kijeedida shduri snbaina musina, mengu suuga juuna, hgaijana juuna. Ne huuqin mengu suuga yixi kundunghula bu kunguan, mula tigiingi awuwa. Dangmani Mongghul yirihgi ne nem shge juudalini duralana. Niuduri malang juugu duralan gua, muulasa huuqinraxja, musisa huabulai gilidina.

Nenqang kunhgi xra wajogdii hgaija juuna, juusza gujira kiini dangla shdaguna.

MUNI HUHUU

Ne 1967 fandi, sncanduini sghuudi ndani ayilidi sayog hudungi yolajagina. Sncandui ndani foori huina kidi jog mantaja, sayogni jolayakiji. Huijifanni nda turaja, turaji boghasa huhuunga.

Huhuu ndani shdugu kidi gusaira gharisanni sunishidaji gua. Ndani naghani yirini, Qijangkari (1948-2009), snkisanni zanjinnajida, sgilini murii tigii kunga. Gan nda turang sga ayaxja, huhuungi yiigula ghada hanaladi qoraji mudeghaguni, "Ndani Zhinyahua guarijigii dangxingi turaja!" Dii gan nda guguazingi tura huja yikang koldi giixja, luasa hugulighadiyaga.

Ndani qinsangni kun, ayilini kunhgi zangda huhuu bulai sgaja

gua. Ganhgi yiiguala muulasa ne do guarijigiinama dundogga. Nda yikang koldi hgalaji ghuran durila, Aama rjela xja, rjesa ne guguazi qiraidi darang halang wuuri yiina, muulasa bu darang huguji gua. Dii gan nda yerishdina tiiriwa kuguaghaxjaya.

Ne 1971 fandi, huhuuni budanghulani ndirii zhiki shdagu kamada gua. Nesi shgedisa, huhuu caihuada shgeda rja. Aama huanglaxja nda tiiri, ayilini smanba tada xja, te smanba mayuu smanda pughaji gui ghoorini handiladi yuu ghuja, ghoori muhani qirainiini shdulijida guiwa. Bu jiu shgedi ulaagu, toxjiniigugija, yixi yidighangi. Huinaha, te yuusan ghajarishdini hiida yitighangi zama rdesa yixi purigee shgeghula. Hiidiwa yitigha jiisindi ulaajagina. Huinaha nige yuusan shdazi ciziraxja, nigijini sangdi niixja. Ndani qinsangni kun zangda smankangdi duriji rjela xji gua.

Bu beeri danglangi, ndani liuhan ayisangi kilena, "Do qi muka turagunaji, tura boghasza jiu qini tigii huhuungiha amahgii?" Dii turaji bogha buliihgira huhuu dii nigeda gharishji gua.

Bu baisi sojin kungi yii, nda darang xniidi luannii. Muni muxigu liuhan kilena, "Do bii xnii. Qini huhuu yang parilasza amahgii?" Bu kileguni, "Bu amaxja? Bu muden, qi lamanqan kunga, bu muuwa, bu qini kuduni dolaji so shdan, bulii tura shdan, buliihgini dola shdan, lisiga wari shdan. Bu darang yan ciziraja? Qi rjesa bu qimu piila adasa, qi yang zhigha yiringi yerila xji!"

SUUL HURAGU KILE

Ne 2000 fansa huinaxi, kunhgi dogu diidigu szari hgaija duralana. Mongghul ghajarishdi hudu quun kun ne diidangmani xuri, aiya, manog, menguhgila szasan hgaijani juuna. Nine kunni kurigeesa, ghadin rogsa szarini hgaijangi, nige xuang szarini suuga da szarini bughuurigi awu ghuana. Ne xni kun ghoorini, ne ghadin da harinog ghoori rogni kun dighaji Wazari, Wuuzindighan szari dalidijin denra, handiladi awula xjilidina. Dangmani sawaa hurajin kun, Mongghul ayilidi xji juudalini hura ghari xna. Mongghul yirihgi muulasa dangmani ne juudalihgini juujin gua, kenmada dii yii juuguna ga, sangdajinhgidi dalididina.

Tayinsuu darang tehgina sghaingi hura giija. Mongghul yiri jiura ganni tigii hura giisanni darang quuguanna. Ne 2020 fandi, bu

Tayinsuuni sgagu sghuudini gan gujirana xuri, aiya, manog, wajoghila szasan tigii hgaijangi juu soja, xni szasanga.

Amaga Tayinsuu aagu masizagu diidangmani hgaijana hura giija,arang quwari tigii dogu diini tigiingi juu soja. Gan kilegu ugoni: Bu nesi ghariji xna, ne hara ghajarishdi soji yixi daa adaguna, tinga bu ne dangmani shdaari yiijin nengi hgaijani juunii. Neni juusa jiu bu diidangmani logna mashidan gui gisannii. Dii nige ha juusa rjegundida sghanna. Budahgi Mongghul hanni luuna mashidaji luu liguna. Jiu nenlaga bu arang nehgini juunii. Neni juusa kii dangla shdana, kiini danglasza niuri kii niugu, loshibara qizi gharigu, ne yiiguadi saina. Arang, mindii, juusza gujini ha giidii shdana. Bu nansa muxigu kunna, gujina gharigha giisa xjeeni hanalani muxini.

CHILDBIRTH IN BON SKOR TIBETAN COMMUNITY: BELIEFS, PERSPECTIVES, AND PRACTICES

Rdo rje dpal 'byor ལྷོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་འབྱུང་། (DuojiJuanjiao 多吉环角)*

ABSTRACT

The cultural and ideological concepts, practices, and beliefs associated with traditional Tibetan pregnancy, childbirth, midwifery, postpartum, and infant care, as well as transitions in an agro-pastoral Tibetan community in the A mdo region through interviews with six local women, are presented in this paper. Four women had traditional home delivery, and two gave birth in a hospital. This study offers insights into childbirth rooted in a gendered context of customs on the cusp of change.

KEYWORDS

Bon skor (Wangshenke), Tibetan pregnancy, prenatal care, childbirth, afterbirth, midwifery

INTRODUCTION

This study of childbirth practices is focused on Bon skor (Wangshenke) Community,¹ Bya mdo (Shagou) Township, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Situated at a latitude of 35°53'10.71"N and a longitude of 100°51'49.42"E, it is 112 kilometers south of Mang ra County Town in southeastern Mtsho lho and 200 kilometers (three hours by bus) from Zi ling (Xining) City, the capital of Mtsho sngon Province.

This pastoral-agricultural community had 2,200 residents and 570 households in five brigades (locally called *ru khag* and officially *dui*) in 2022. Grassland was divided and assigned to each household based on the number of family members and livestock from 2000-2003. Farmland was allocated to each household in 1983. Some families made a living by herding and farming, while

* Rdo rje dpal 'byor (DuojiJuanjiao). 2023. Childbirth in Bon skor Tibetan Community: Beliefs, Perspectives, and Practices. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:219-255.

¹See Nangchakja (2016:53-166) for more about this community.

others only farmed. Certain locals sold their livestock because of a grass shortage and rented their pastures to other families. Families with sheep, goats, and horses moved from one pasture to another (leased grazing land) to herd livestock.²

Beginning in about 2019, families constructed large air-brick, closed-roof animal pens. Some families built them privately, while others received partial government support. Pens were mostly used for sheltering livestock in winter due to limited grass, harsh weather, and difficulty supplying water to livestock from distant water sources. Livestock were fed corn, barley, oats, and bales of hay. Tap water was also provided.

Sheep were the main source of meat and shorn during the fourth to sixth lunar months. Wool was used to make quilts, mattresses, and felt and was often sold for cash to Muslim buyers. A small amount of wool was used in religious rituals, for instance, making *rmu thag*² for *lab rtse*³ renewal.

Barley, wheat, and canola were cultivated to make roasted barley flour, wheat flour, and oil, respectively, for home consumption. Surplus grain was sold for cash. Locals historically harvested crops by hand, but the current use of harvest machines means few people are required.⁴

Each household had a brick house built with government subsidy in the farming area that also featured a community ma Ni hall,⁵ Yul lha temple,⁶ and a community kindergarten and

²A local community leader provided this information.

² Very long wool threads. See Nangchukja (2011:230) for a photograph.

³ A sacred place usually at higher elevation where mountain deities are worshipped.

⁴ In August 2022, Bsod nams rab brtan (b. 1975) said he was the only community resident with a combine. He purchased it in 2020 and used it to harvest for locals and neighboring communities. He charged sixty RMB per *mu* (one *mu* = 0.67 hectares) and harvested about thirty *mu* daily.

⁵ A place where religious activities (circumambulation, prostration, scripture chanting, turning prayer wheels, and so on) are held.

⁶ After the community's relocation, a deity temple was rebuilt in the 1980s, three kilometers from the current farming area, where locals often burned incense to pray for prosperity and protection. A rig lha khang 'A rig Temple' refers to this temple. See Nangchukja (2016:100-103) for more.

elementary school for grades one to three.

Locals tended cattle in nearby pastures and fed them hay and leftover food. Cows were milked to provide milk, which was used to make butter, cheese, and yogurt for self-consumption. A few families earned income from selling milk and cheese to local community members. During the fifth to sixth lunar months, some locals went to Mgo log (Guoluo) areas to collect caterpillar fungus.

Hundreds of camels before 1958 were used to transport three to four times (tents and other belongings) as much as horses. However, only a few camels were in Bon skor Village in 2022. Fencing contributed to infrequent breeding.¹

Official policy on environmental protection banned livestock from grazing on degraded pasture and pasture that was becoming desert, contributing to a dwindling number of people engaged in herding.² Many gave up herding, migrated to county and township towns to operate grocery stores, snack shops, and Tibetan clothing stores, and took jobs as restaurant workers, cleaners, and tailors. However, some people were unemployed because they lacked the skills or determination to do non-herding work. Some residents bought sheep, rented grassland, and resumed herding life.

Meanwhile, after 2000, children were increasingly sent to schools because of an awareness of education's importance and the nine-year Compulsory Education policy. In 1987, the County Education Bureau initiated a primary school project in the local community's farming area, and children were gradually sent to school. Each student was required to provide 500 kilograms of sheep droppings and cow dung for fuel, seven and a half kilos of mutton or yak meat, and one hundred kilos of grain. In addition, each student paid thirty to fifty RMB per semester. These

¹ See Wen changjia and Stuart (2014:110-113), Snying lcags rgyal (Nangchukja 2011:33-35), (Nangchukja 2016:59-62), and Skal bzang tshe brtan (2017a, 2017(b), 2021) for more on local camels.

² Certain grassland began to be restricted from grazing by government in 2016 with local grassland owners annually compensated 12.6 RMB per *mu*. In 2022, the subsidy increased to 15.38 RMB per *mu*. Grazing was still banned.

requirements continued until 2006.¹ Before the 1980s, schooling was nearly free in the local community.

This paper explores the cultural and ideological concepts, practices, and beliefs associated with traditional Tibetan pregnancy, childbirth, midwifery, postpartum, and infancy care, as well as childbirth transitions in Bon skor Community. In doing so, insights are provided into the traditional childbirth aspect of Tibetan women's lives grounded in a gendered context of rapidly altering customs.

A central purpose of having children in Bon skor is to continue the patrilineal line of descent by strongly favoring males over females. Childless parents often adopt a child (preferably male) from their siblings or close relatives to carry on their family line. If the children are only females, one of the girls must stay home, bring a husband to her home, and is expected to produce an heir. Giving birth to more than one child provides companionship among siblings and, importantly, mutual assistance between siblings when encountering predicaments. Locals feel relationships between cousins are more distant than siblings, highlighting the importance of having close siblings to assist in times of need.

A historical lack of contraception meant women had little choice in childbirth. Once pregnant, women had to give birth, sometimes against their will, and birth intervals were often short. When the first child was unwell, locals believed that having a second child would help the first child recover. The younger sibling was akin to the older sibling's amulet, protecting the older sibling from illness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I recognize considerable research on Tibetan childbirth; for example, Google Scholar returned 7,910 citations when "Tibetan childbirth" was inputted.² Craig (2009), for example, described the biosocial landscape of pregnancy and childbirth among Tibetan

¹ See Nangchukja (2016:120).

² <https://bit.ly/3fJczjT> 5 October 2022.

communities in the Asian highlands. After a short dialogue about birthing with a local woman in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), she explored Tibetan knowledge and practices while pregnant and parturition. She also described mortality and morbidity rates in Tibetan areas, how pregnancy and birth are intertwined with Tibetan Buddhism and medicine, and the nutritional prescriptions and restrictions codified in Traditional Tibetan Medicine (TTM) theory.

A tendency to generalize Tibetan birth-giving is evident, e.g., "women often give birth alone. Sometimes, women will deliver in an animal pen" (150), and "the consumption of alcohol is common during pregnancy in many Tibetan areas" (155). These generalizations do not describe childbirth in Bon skor.

Adams et al. (2005a) applied anthropological methods to collect data by interviewing thirty-eight rural Tibetan women in the TAR. The purpose of this study was to initiate a village birth attendant training program appropriate to the rural Tibetan context, where the maternal mortality ratio was reported to be as high as 400-500/100,000 for some areas, and the infant mortality within the first twelve months was as high as twenty to thirty percent (statistics based on reports from both the TAR Health Bureau (2001–2003) and the Mal gro gung dkar (Mozhugongka) County Health Bureau (2003), and independent reporting as part of One HEART's midwife training program reporting, monitoring, and evaluation). The study described and analyzed rural Tibetan women's conceptions of safe delivery according to biomedicine. Some findings of this study correspond with my study site, e.g.:

...having a safe delivery involved doing a variety of things to protect oneself and unborn fetus and, later, the newborn, from potential harm. These efforts revolved around the following key categories: fear of attacks by spirits/demons and negative health effects of meeting strangers; fear of and taboos against pollution/defilement (grib)... (826).

Based on interviews with eight women, Klu mo tshe ring and Roche (2011) studied Tibetan childbirth in two villages of Rdo sbis Township, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Mtsho sngon

Province. This study site and mine are agro-pastoral areas 250 kilometers apart. Their study reports differences in childbirth practices. For example, one of the interviewees described the position during the delivery:

When a woman is giving birth, we ask her to crouch and lean back against something. This makes birth easier, but the best way is for the woman to stand (53).

Moreover, the baby's grandfather puts the afterbirth in a cloth bag and buries it. However, in Bon skor, a woman often buried the placenta three to seven days after delivery. These differences highlight the need for more local studies to comprehensively describe the many Tibetan regional variations in childbirth.

According to a study by Kunchok Gyaltsen et al. (2007) of the lives and health of Tibetan women and children in rural Mtsho sngon, only thirty percent of women visited healthcare providers during pregnancy. Almost all (ninety-three percent) of the respondents gave birth at home. The rates of professional birth attendance were quite low because most village doctors were not trained to assist in childbirth. Moreover, most healthcare workers were men and culturally prohibited from childbirth in certain Tibetan areas. Furthermore, certain families couldn't afford to travel to or stay at the township or county town where medical care was available before the delivery. The same study noted that the national birth planning program from 1982-2016 increased awareness of and access to contraception in rural areas. Breastfeeding was common; ninety-seven percent of women indicated they had breastfed their babies. The authors concluded that women offered complementary foods to infants at one, two, and five months. *Rtsam pa*,¹ wheat flour soup, and meat were common supplementary foods given to infants, which accords with what my interviewees told me.

¹ A staple food made from roasted barley flour. Hot tea, butter, sugar to taste, and dried cheese were often added.

CONSULTANTS

I interviewed six local Tibetan women identified as 'consultants' in this paper in January, February, and August 2022. I talked privately to each (one-to-one) to reduce their discomfort and embarrassment. The interviewees' names have been changed to protect their privacy. Their ages are real.

Each consultant's background is provided, along with their childbirth experiences. Four had vaginal deliveries without intervention at home. They were the last generations practicing traditional home birth. In contrast, the other two had hospital deliveries, one by cesarean section and one by vaginal delivery.

Discussions with each consultant were shaped by questions prepared before the interview. The interviews were recorded on the phone. The women were also encouraged to talk freely about their birthing experiences beyond the questions. Afterward, I summarized their key points.

The interviewees used the terms used in the interviews, including Colloquial Tibetan (CT), Literary Tibetan (LT), and Chinese, which I clarified in the footnotes.

These six local women were chosen as consultants for this research for several reasons. First, they are women of different generations that lived in different social conditions. The two in their seventies and the two in their fifties represent the last generations to give birth at home. To illustrate recent changes in childbirth, two younger women who had experienced hospital delivery were included.

Women in their seventies were typical traditional women giving birth at short intervals without access to contraception. One gave birth to ten children, and the other gave birth to eight. Women in their fifties gave birth to fewer children due to government birth control policy and access to contraception.

ACCOUNT ONE: BTSUN KHO (b. 1944)

Women of my generation gave birth at home, which is different from childbirth today. We lacked access to physical examinations, prenatal check-ups, and

medical care from doctors who specialized in birthing.

Women gave birth to many children at very short birth intervals. Most women had eight to fifteen children. I gave birth to ten children. We did not have much choice in childbirth. Once pregnant, we had to give birth, sometimes against our will. When I stopped menstruating, I worried I would have another child who would be another burden, but I had no choice because I lacked access to contraception.

We lived in the time of the *gung hre* (Ch, *gongshe* 'communes'¹), so I had to work in the *shengchandu* 'production teams' until I entered labor. Otherwise, I would not have received *gongfen* 'work points'.²

Though religious activities were prohibited, my family secretly asked a monk to chant *Tshe dbang*³ during my pregnancy.

All the food was chemical-free, which made it healthier. As living conditions improved, more food choices became available; nevertheless, some

¹ The locally known *mi dmangs gung hre* (officially, *renmin gongshe* 'people's commune') were established in 1958. Locals also used *nga brgyad lo'i zing* 'khrug 'chaos in 1958', *za ma dka ngal gyi dus* 'food shortage period', and 'byor med yar langs 'uprising of poor people' for that chaotic period. The state confiscated locals' farmland and livestock. Residents plowed land and grew, watered, and reaped wheat, barley, and canola. The state collected wheat, barley, canola, animals, and animal products from the community. The Village Committee controlled cropland and livestock. The harvest portion given to the state was 'bru khya (LT: 'bru khral (Ch, *liangshui*) 'grain tax'. The remaining wheat was placed in storage and later distributed to households based on *gongfen* 'work points'. According to Gsang sgrog, a local man (b. 1945), *zhing sa sger la bgo ba* 'assigning cropland to private owners', *zog lug sger la bgo ba* 'dividing livestock among private owners', Baochandaohu 'return property to households' policies were implemented in Bon skor from 1981 to 1982. Each household acquired individual farmland and livestock. Locals subsequently cultivated their own farmland and raised their own livestock. *Bzo zhing* 'agro-industrial' tax was another tax after the 1980s. Out of one hundred sheep and goats per household, seven to eight livestock were mandatory tax paid to the township town and government. *Bzo zhing* was abolished in the late 1990s.

² Those who could work were expected to support their families and had to work daily to earn *gongfen*, which was the standard for money and some grain distribution. Family members who could work supported children, elders, and the disabled who did not receive this portion.

³ A scripture often chanted to protect a pregnant woman and her fetus and ensure long lives. After chanting, the woman consumed a small round piece of sweet *rstam ba* known as *tshe sgrub ril bu* 'longevity pellet' and tasted *tshe chang* 'longevity liquor'.

foods are harmful to pregnant women and fetuses and would likely lead to illness if consumed. The meat of a sheep killed by wolves or dead from being trapped in mud was taboo because it might change the baby's sex, cause an early birth, cause a child's death, and so forth.

The only source of medication was a Tibetan doctor in the local township town who often prescribed three types of powdered Tibetan medicine. One was for prenatal consumption, one during labor, and another for postpartum use. They were all supposed to relieve pain during and after labor.

People preferred having male children because they could stay home to continue the *khyim rgyud*' lineage'.

We often predict the unborn baby's sex based on the curvature of the belly. If the belly is round and elevated, it is likely male. If the belly is flatter and lower, it is likely a female. Locals commonly remark that females sit forward and kneel in the mother's uterus, signifying they would move to another family when they marry. Males turn backward and sit cross-legged, meaning they would stay at home. My experience was in accord with what other women said. Labor for male infants was more difficult with back pain, while female infants were less difficult with abdominal pain.

I tied my firstborn to my back with a sash during the farming season and went to the fields where I hollowed out a small circular hole with my weeding tool and paved it with a plastic sheet where he could rest and lean back. We called this *skyid dung* 'joyful circular space'.¹ An umbrella was used to shade the baby when possible. Afterward, we weeded the fields and fed the baby when it cried. This was all common local practice.

As my older children grew up, they helped care for the younger ones, allowing me to leave them at home while I farmed.

Some women were attended by their husbands when they gave birth, but I was mostly accompanied by a close friend with eight children. We helped each other give birth. I carefully considered who to choose as a birth attendant because untrustworthy women speak negatively about you behind your back after serving as your midwife. My first childbirth was attended by a woman famous for having easy labor and often invited as a birth attendant. They believed her presence would somehow ease their labor. I don't know why, but I had easy labor for my first child.

My birth attendant was responsible for giving massages during labor

¹ A term local women used to describe a place where babies lay or sat while mothers were busy with agricultural labor.

contraction and cutting the lte thag 'umbilical cord' after delivery. Infants were wrapped in lambskin and washed three to seven days after delivery in lukewarm water with a few juniper needles and a bit of salt. After this initial wash, they were bathed once or twice yearly.

If I lacked breastmilk soon after birth, I often fed a bit of butter to the baby. A sheep is often slaughtered after delivery to help the mother gain energy and have sufficient milk for the baby. Before eating meat, my mother asked me to chew a piece of leg meat, spit it out, and then have sausage specially made for me. The main food I had was mutton broth and soup with *rtsam pa*. I also drank tea with black sugar that would help discharge the lochia.

Women were allowed one month of rest after birth during the communal labor period, but I only rested for seven days since no one could help me with cooking and house chores. After delivery, the commune administration provided black sugar and a sheep.

People often say that the postpartum period should last for one month. Gradual interaction with Chinese people influenced the concept of postpartum because my mother's and grandmother's generation didn't rest for even a day.

Women who gave birth in their husbands' homes were not allowed to give birth on the adobe bed where family members slept and ate since they were not from or born in this family. The delivery was thought to pollute the hearth or irritate the stove spirit, causing trouble for the family's well-being. Instead, they gave birth on the earthen floor, preferably near the thab ka 'adobe stove' where they could stay warm.

Conversely, a woman who gave birth at her natal home was allowed to use the adobe bed. Sheep or horse dung powder was prepared before the delivery. Horse dung was preferred because it had a mild smell compared to sheep dung. Besides, some said mares gave birth easily, so we used horse dung. A tattered sheep or goatskin discarded after delivery was placed atop the dung powder. Not all women could give birth in a predetermined place. Some women unexpectedly gave birth outside the home or in the family yard.

I did not move to my husband's home after my marriage. Instead, I stayed at my parents' home with my husband. Thus, I gave birth at my natal home and was allowed to deliver on my family's adobe bed covered with powdered horse dung and old sheep skin. During labor, I wore a *bang rtsag*¹ with nothing under it.

¹ Women in labor wore a sheepskin robe that had been typically worn in daily life.

I knelt and gripped a long sash fastened to a wooden ceiling pole to elevate my upper body to give birth.

It was considered harmful and potentially fatal if the *gzhug*¹ 'placenta' was not expelled soon after delivery. Local women hoped the placenta would discharge naturally. Several local women died when this did not occur.

Certain older community women removed a retained placenta by rolling the umbilical cord onto their index finger and slowly drawing it out. At the same time, the palm of the other hand circled the belly. One of my contemporaries died of excessive bleeding after a long period of placenta retention. I, fortunately, experienced no such problems.

We had no pads, so blood, secretions, and the placenta discharged onto the dung powder instead of the ground. It was considered harmful to the infant and mother if the latter occurred. Wet dung powder and the placenta were placed to one side. Within three to seven days, the placenta was packed in a bag with dung powder and buried in ashes outside the house, often by a woman. My mother buried mine beneath the house floor near the adobe bed. In other cases, it was buried beneath the doorway in the belief that it would prevent future harm.

For one to two weeks following the birth, cow dung or firewood was placed at the house entrance to signify that a woman had given birth. Only immediate family members were permitted to enter, particularly at night, to protect the mother and infant's health. In other instances, individuals were allowed to enter the house but were expected to step over a fire or through the smoke before entering. They were not allowed to enter a small separate room where the infant and mother resided.

A '*dzong khug*' handmade felt bag with filtered fine ash' was most used to collect a baby's urine and excrement. The infant was often placed in this bag with the bag's mouth reaching the baby's chest. Two cloth strips fastened to the bag mouth were knotted to prevent the '*dzong khug*' from sliding down. Caregivers occasionally stirred the ash wetted by the urine to balance the dried and wet ash. The ash was replaced at least twice a day.

A *bla ma* or monk often determined the *lag ljibs* 'baby's first clothing'. It was suggested that one of my children wear red clothes, so I used a piece of red cloth to make a dress.

We offered *bsang* 'incense' if the baby was a male, and an auspicious

¹ The term locals commonly used to refer to the placenta. *Bu rogs* 'baby's companion' was also used.

day was selected for the infant's first outing. A family member held the infant and circled the house, usually on a horse, for some minutes. There were no such activities after the birth of a girl.

A *bla ma* or a knowledgeable elder gave my children's names within three or seven days after birth. Children's names were changed if the baby was ill or cried a lot. None of my children had a name change.

When children cried a lot, especially at night, in a way they did not often do, we assumed loud noise had frightened them. In that case, I often held a piece of burning firewood or cow dung in a clamp and circled it over the child's head while saying:

TEXT AS SPOKEN

¹ང་ཞི་ལི་(ཞི་མོ་) མ་སྐལ་

²ས་སྐལ་ རྡོ་སྐལ་

³མ་ལིང་དམར་དྲིལ་སྐལ་

¹ngi zhi li/zhi mo ma skyag.

²sa skyag, rdo skyag.

³mye ling dmar dris skyag.

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

¹ང་ཞི་ལི་(ཞི་མོ་) མ་སྐལ་

²ས་སྐལ་ རྡོ་སྐལ་

³མ་ལིང་དམར་དྲིལ་འདྲིལ་སྐལ་

¹ng'i zhi li/zhi mo ma skrag.

²sa skrag, rdo skrag.

³me ling dmar dris 'dir skrag.

TRANSLATION

¹Do not fear, my child.

²Fear earth, fear stone.

³Fear this little flaming fuel.

When I finished chanting, I placed the burnt fuel in a bowl of water before the infant to remove their fear, which often calmed the child. An infant's head, belly, and

chest were often washed with *khrus chu* 'sacred water'¹ blown on by a holy *bla ma* or a monk.

Zha nye skor ba 'lead melting' (a detailed description from another interviewee follows below) was another ritual. It was risky and should be practiced with caution. I rarely practiced it, though other locals often did, considering it beneficial.² When infants were taken outdoors, soot on a pot bottom was rubbed between their eyebrows or on their nose to prevent *grib* 'defilement'³ that negatively affects infant health.

ACCOUNT TWO: LHA MTSO (b. 1946)

Life was joyful and excellent before 1958 without any life concerns. We had rich and abundant food - butter, cheese, yogurt, *rtsam pa*, and meat - and splendid coral necklaces, silver adornments, and robes. Our life changed dramatically in 1958. People experienced food shortages, and my beloved family members died because of the chaos. In the year I was twelve, communal labor began. Farming and herding were separated. I stayed in the farming area, where we plowed fields and cultivated barley, canola, and wheat. Horses, donkeys, and mules pulled a threshing stone over wheat and barley stalks spread on the threshing ground. The grain was put in the communal administration granary, and we dined collectively in the communal restaurant. Sometimes, we consumed wheat bran and wild edible plants.

I married when I was seventeen and moved to my husband's family. I gave birth to eight children. One was stillborn.

It was inevitable to give birth to many children during my time because we had no contraceptives like today.

I was very sick, lacked appetite, was tired, and vomited a lot during my first trimester of pregnancy. We had no medication.

¹ Sacred water was used to soothe infants and was also believed to remove ailments from the body via the power of *bla ma* or monks chanting scriptures while sanctifying the water.

² For a vivid 2019 video example of using molten lead with a child in Churing (Qurang) Village, Thang dkar ma (Tanggemu) Town, Gser chen (Gonghe) County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, see Skal bzang tshe brtan (2019).

³ Invisible pollution that causes human illness, usually through encountering unclean things, eating contaminated food, and wearing unclean clothes.

I longed for a son because a man's great physical strength allows him to work hard. Depending on a son-in-law is difficult. More importantly, a son is an honor for the parents after their deaths since he deals with their corpses rather than other males. A daughter is not allowed to do this.

During my first pregnancy, my father-in-law consulted *bla ma* about my safety and my unborn child's. The *bla ma* advised that I not eat meat from outside, especially *gri sha/dbab sha*¹ and *tshe thar* 'free life',² offer incense, and return to my natal home to safely give birth to a son. My family did what he advised. Religious activities were banned, so we couldn't do much religious chanting or ritual.

My first child (a son) was born in my natal home in a black-yak-hair tent at the *mo khyim* 'women's side' near the tent opening, instead of at the back of the tent and *pho khyim* 'men's side'.³ The childbirth and discharge were considered filthy, polluting, and would irritate the deities, so *bang lud* 'dung powder' was spread on the ground, and I gave birth, kneeling and wearing a sheepskin robe. It lasted three days and was my most difficult labor. My mother and another woman who had easy labor attended me, massaging my back. At midnight, during my labor contraction, my husband confidentially called a local tantric practitioner who families often summoned during difficult labor. He chanted scriptures, blessed me with prayer beads, and sprayed *khrus chu* over my body from his mouth. When labor was prolonged, my uncle offered incense and sprinkled alcohol for local deities, imploring the mountain deities to protect and

¹ These terms locally referred to meat of a sheep that had died from falling down a mountain, wolf attack, or stuck in mud.

² This term described the custom of liberating/saving a sheep from death (*tshe blu* and *srog blu* were also used). Liberating a sheep, according to Lha sgron, involved smearing butter on the horns, all four hooves, nose, ears, upper lip, and tail. A woolen thread knotted with a tuft of wool (*srung rtags* 'protection mark') was attached to sheep's back. Juniper needles were burned for purification. Afterward, *chu dkar dkar* 'white water'/'water mixed with milk' was poured onto the sheep from its rear to its head while *chu nag nag* 'black water'/'cold water' was poured from the head to the rear. It was a good sign if the sheep shook. Locals believed this ritual helped a person have a long life. After an animal was freed, it was not slaughtered but could be sheared and its lambs could be slaughtered.

³ Gender determined where men and women sat in a black yak-hair tent. The *mo khyim* 'women's side' was on the left when entering a tent and to the right was the *pho khyim* 'men's side'. Buddhist images or scriptures were often at the upper part of the men's side.

bless my baby and me. Meanwhile, my husband secretly went to the former A rig lha khang 'A rig Temple' site¹ and offered *bsang*, put sheep wool on a caragana tree to liberate the trees² there, and implored Yul lha that I safely give birth.

Widows and women whose children had died were not allowed to be birth attendants for fear they would bring bad luck to the unborn baby.

Soon after birth, I didn't have milk to nurse my son, so my husband fed him a little butter. A day later, my family slaughtered the sheep the commune administration provided. I gained strength and energy and produced more breast milk after having *rgyu sha*.³ I also often had a watery mixture of tea with black sugar. Occasionally, a small amount of deer musk was added to mutton soup, which was good for my recovery.

It is extremely important to keep warm after childbirth, so I wore my sheepskin robe and wrapped my head with a headscarf to stay warm. My mother and aunt often said that if a woman does not remain warm and touches cold water, she may have health issues such as joint pain, menstrual disorders, etc. They often said drinking cold water after delivery was deadly, so I avoided drinking anything cold. Also, it was said that cold wind blowing into the eyes soon after birth would hurt the eyes.

We attributed health issues after the first childbirth to the incomplete discharge of lochia and inadequate attention to diet and physical protection. We believed a woman would recover from the second childbirth, provided she protected herself appropriately, for example, keeping away from cold drinks and staying warm by wearing a thick sheepskin robe for at least several weeks, which would facilitate lochia and any bad secretion expulsions retained during childbirth.

I gave birth to children with my husband's assistance after several childbirth experiences with female birth attendants. I severed the umbilical cord, washed my newborns with lukewarm water containing a few juniper needles, and wrapped them in lambskin.

¹ This local deity temple was built in Bon po zhing kha (the former Bon skor Community location thirty kilometers from the current location) and was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Afterward, some locals secretly went there and burned incense. The temple was rebuilt at its current location after resettlement in the 1980s.

² Locals customarily liberated trees by attaching sheep wool tufts to the branches, signifying cutting such trees was taboo. Trees were liberated for longevity and to sustain life, especially in the case of illness.

³ Sausage stuffed with blood and minced meat from sheep legs and the neck specially made for lying-in women.

Infants' clothes were not prepared before their birth. Instead, we made clothes after asking a knowledgeable person for the color of the clothes they should wear.

A fetus's sex may change in the mother's uterus or shortly after delivery. A male can change into a female but not vice versa. For example, strangers' arrival at night at home during late pregnancy is believed to cause a sex change, so pregnant women are generally not allowed to greet guests. Also, foods from outside the house are considered unhealthy because they might cause *grib*.¹

During one of my late pregnancies, my husband and several carpenters came to my house late in the afternoon. I had acute abdominal pain that night, and my labor started. A *bla ma* had predicted that the baby would be male, but it was female after birth. We believed that the sex had changed because of the carpenters' arrival. Soon after birth, I saw that my daughter's vagina was red, which suggested that her sex might really have changed.

Locals often said when a male infant is born, a person should immediately touch the infant's penis to prevent sex change.

My oldest son was frequently ill with fever and diarrhea from the time he was four months old. A local *bla ma* told my husband and me that a younger sibling would be the older sibling's *srung* 'khor 'amulet', meaning that the presence of the younger sibling had the power to protect the older sibling from illnesses. Consequently, he recovered after I delivered my second child.

I gave my children short two-syllable *gces ming* 'nicknames' based on their formal names. Nicknames are convenient and signify love and care.

Infants often slept with their mothers, who were primary caregivers for the infants after delivery. Fathers seldom engaged in childrearing. Although fathers sometimes provided temporary care for children, the frequency and duration of such care did not match that of the mothers. The mother woke up three to four times to breastfeed the newborn. In extreme cases, a mother stayed up all night to care for a constantly crying newborn. Mothers slept less than fathers, who slept as normal. During the day, mothers carried their children while doing housework. Some mothers carried their newborns tied with a sash on their backs, while others put them in their robe pouch.

My older children played an important role in childrearing, caring for their

¹ Pregnant women and fetuses were considered vulnerable and easily influenced by *grib* people and items might bring. A fetus undergoing a sex change might have resulted from a pregnant woman encountering *grib*.

younger siblings, and lessening my burden.

Infants frightened by loud noises, animals, vehicles, and so on often cried and sometimes screamed, especially at night. To dispel the fear, we practiced *zha nye skor ba*. Lead was melted in a ladle with a piece of sheep fat over a stove's open fire. When it was completely molten, the scoop was swirled above the baby's head with the person holding the scoop saying:

ORAL TIBETAN

¹ས་སྐྱག་རྩོ་སྐྱག་

²མི་སྐྱག་ན་མི་འདྲ་འདྲ།

³ཁྱེ་སྐྱག་ན་ཁྱེ་འདྲ་འདྲ།

⁴སྐྱག་སྐྱག་ཐམས་ཅད་འདྲེ་ཤོག་

¹Sa skyag, rdo skyag.

²Mye skyag na myi 'dra 'dra,

³Khye sgyag na khyi 'dra 'dra,

⁴Skygs skyag thams cad 'de shog.

LITERARY TEXT

¹ས་སྐྱག་རྩོ་སྐྱག་

²མི་ལ་སྐྱག་ན་མི་འདྲ་འདྲ།

³ཁྱེ་ལ་སྐྱག་ན་ཁྱེ་འདྲ་འདྲ།

⁴སྐྱག་སྐྱག་ཐམས་ཅད་འདྲེ་ཤོག་

¹Sa skyag, rdo skyag.

²Mi la skrag na mi 'dra 'dra,

³khye la skrag na khyi 'dra 'dra,

⁴skrag skrag thams cad 'dir shog.

TRANSLATION

¹Fear earth, fear stone.

²Fear man, akin to man.

³Fear dog, akin to dog.

⁴All those feared may come here.

After swirling the scoop of molten lead three times, it was poured into a bowl of cold water in front of the infant. The infant's attention was drawn to the

lead as it was poured into the water. Locals assumed the molten lead would solidify into an image resembling a dog, cat, or a man that had terrified the infant. The dread was removed by touching the infant's forehead and chest with the solid lead removed from the water. Finally, the lead was melted again into a circular shape, a hole was made in the middle, and then fastened onto the infant's clothing with a thread to protect the child from fear.

ACCOUNT THREE: BYAMS SKYID (b. 1962)

I began tending my family's goat kids and lambs when I was six. My parents divorced when I was six. My mother and grandmother raised me. It was the era of communal labor when the whole community shared pastureland and livestock. We lived in a black yak-hair tent in the pastoral area of our community and migrated seasonally to tend sheep and goats. We were sometimes required to go to the farming area to plow and weed communal fields and harvest barley, canola, and wheat.

Recently, most people have given up herding livestock and farming and have moved to the township town, where officials constructed houses for them. But I am reluctant to give up herding because there is no work I can do to earn a livelihood in a township town. So I am still here in the old place, herding sheep, even though my family owns a brick house near the township town.

I married at twenty-two and moved to my husband's family near the Rma chu 'Yellow River'. I gave birth to four children. I delivered my first child when I was twenty-three.

I didn't know I was pregnant until I told a woman I craved and even dreamed of dumplings. She said that I was going to have a child. It was true.

Women generally conceal pregnancy, so I only told my husband when I was pregnant. Others know you are pregnant when your belly protrudes. I never visited a doctor nor had medical tests during my pregnancies.

Although life was challenging, I longed for children. Children need to have company while they are young and elderly. Besides, there was no birth control until the mid-1980s. It was prohibited for women to have more than three children. Local women were required to undergo *jiezha* 'sterilization'.¹ Physicians came to the community yearly to take women to the local township town for sterilization,

¹ *Jiezha* is a Chinese term learned from local doctors for ligation. No Tibetan term is used.

but I didn't go. I didn't have time to rest. No one would have cared for me after the procedure. The government fined my family 300RMB after my fourth child, a huge sum then.

After my first childbirth, I spent five days in bed, put on a sheepskin robe, and resumed weeding the fields with other women. At noon, my mother-in-law requested I return home and prepare lunch. I kneaded the fermenting dough to make bread, but my mind went blank. When I regained consciousness, I realized I had fallen and stepped on the dough. The metal plate for holding bread lay next to me. I was dizzy and had no idea how I had fallen. I had difficulty concentrating on what I was doing until it finally registered that I was preparing lunch.

I quickly stood with an anxious and concerned mind. I worried about handling the dough I had stepped on, now contaminated with dirt. I was terrified that others would see and humiliate me as a newlywed, so I threw it into a pigsty trough. Despite being famished, I was exhausted from making bread and frying potatoes for lunch.

Twenty days after delivery, I was so weak and disoriented that I could no longer do household duties. I had no desire to do anything but lie in bed and sleep. Understanding my situation, my uncle came on horseback with another horse and escorted me to my natal home, where my family slaughtered a sheep for me. I recovered after many days of rest.

There were criteria for women chosen as birth attendants at that time. There were no professional midwives. Normally, women were invited to serve as midwives who were not widows, had multiple sons, and none of their children had died. We believed being accompanied by those women eased the delivery process and made birth safer. Conversely, widows and those whose children had died carried bad luck.

A local woman with thirteen children attended my first birth. I gave birth alone to my other children. Unlike most women, I wanted to give birth alone. I didn't even allow my mother to attend to me during labor. I felt uneasy and uncomfortable delivering near a midwife. Despite the intense agony of labor contraction while delivering my first child, I could not utter a sound. After labor, I found that my quilt was torn because I had gnawed it.

I became pregnant with my second daughter at the age of twenty-six. The most memorable and dangerous work I did during my pregnancy was on the roof of a house on the verge of collapse. The house was very close to the rising Yellow

River.¹ One afternoon, I collected timber from that house to build an adobe house in an area where we herded around eighty goats. The roof suddenly collapsed as I removed soil from the roof, sending me plummeting to the ground surrounded by wood and roiling dust. I was unable to move. I sat there with extreme pain in my waist until my husband arrived late in the afternoon. Fortunately, I landed on my buttocks, and my belly was unharmed, or I might have miscarried. The discomfort in my back lingered for months, even during labor. It was the most excruciating childbirth I experienced.

Toward the end of my fourth pregnancy, my spouse and I split the cropland and harvested evenly. I harvested wheat with a sickle while physically frail and uncomfortable with intermittent leg cramps and swollen feet. I had never complained before, but sometimes I couldn't help but groan from the searing pain in my legs and back. This annoyed and infuriated my husband, who accused me of being slow. He left soon after completing his portion of harvest duty. The weather was sweltering. I used every bit of my energy until late afternoon to finish my duties and prepared supper after I returned home.

My first and second children were girls. We wanted a boy, so my family invited Bla ma Kho tshe² (1949-2016) to our home. He instructed me to go to Sku 'bum Monastery,³ chant *Gcod pa*⁴ 500 times, and prostrate in front of the Gser gdung.⁵ I did what he advised and eventually delivered a son.

I longed for a son because a male doesn't need to experience many of the hardships experienced by a female, such as menstruation, childbirth, and raising children. Besides, women must leave their parents and serve their husbands' families while a man can stay home and pursue his interests.

We usually guess the baby's sex through the shape of the mother's belly.

¹ In 2007, the rise of the Rma chu rose due to the dam creating Tshal rigna Reservoir 'Longyangxia' led Brigade Five to resettle near Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township Town, Mang ra County.

² Locals greatly respected this *bla ma* from Khri ka County, who was often invited to local homes and communities after a death and associated religious rituals, and when a person was severely ill.

³ Sku 'bum byams pa gling, a Tibetan monastery in Tsong kha (Huangzhong) County, was twenty-six kilometers from Zi ling (Nian and Bai 1993:39-45). Today, this monastery is in the administrative region of Zi ling City. See Smith (2017:224) for a photo of the monastery.

⁴ A scripture often chanted in the hope of having a son.

⁵ A small temple with a stupa built on the site of Rje tsong kha pa's (born in Tsong kha in 1357 and the founder of the Dge lugs School of Tibetan Buddhism) birthplace at the contemporary Sku 'bum Monastery.

If the belly is round and elevated, it is likely male, while it is likely a female if it is flatter and lower. Also, the baby is probably a girl if the mother has significant physical discomfort, such as nausea, lethargy, and loss of appetite. In contrast, if the woman has no physical discomfort in the first trimester, the baby is likely a boy.

Before my third labor, my *bang chu* 'amniotic fluid' leaked as I sat on the ground near the pigsty with my mother-in-law and another woman. I was too embarrassed to tell them or stand. I waited till their departure. My trousers were smeared with dirt. I immediately returned to the house and put on my robe. There were no further indications of impending birth for the next two days. On the third night, my abdomen was uncomfortable, but I did not inform anyone, not even my husband, who had gone to bed after supper. When someone was near me during labor, I felt restricted and uncomfortable. I retreated to the small bedroom I shared with my husband and locked the door.

My mother visited me at the time, coinciding with my delivery. At night, she went to bed. I did not tell her or my husband that my belly was uncomfortable. The discomfort had started in the late afternoon. When I am alone, I feel comfortable and at ease. I was unprepared for delivery, so when the labor pains subsided, I hurried outside to collect a full basin of soil and spread it on the floor near the adobe stove.

My mother noticed my constant movement between the bedroom and the house and came to the door of my room several times, asking about my situation. I refused to let her in, insisting I was fine and showing no indication of discomfort. I don't know why, but I find other people's approaches irritating. Finally, I delivered a son, my third child, early in the morning. Shortly after birth, I asked my husband to get up and hand me the scissors and threads I had prepared and placed on a desk.

Not knowing that I had just given birth, he responded furiously, "Why are you waking me? I must get up early in the morning to work."

When he heard the baby's screams, he sprang out of bed, ran to me, and complimented me. He was so delighted he could not locate the scissors and threads on the desk. He left after handing me the scissors and two threads. I put the infant between my outstretched legs in front of me and tied the cord on both sides, leaving two centimeters on the baby's and mother's sides.

After birth, my husband notified my mother. She hurriedly arrived and scolded me for not informing her during labor. Worse, she was enraged when she realized the baby had been born on the earthen floor without covering the floor with sheep dung powder to prevent blood discharge and afterbirth from contacting

the earth. Locals often say this irritates certain spirits and adversely affects children, who might get pimples on their faces and cry. My mother buried the placenta deep under the ash accumulation from the adobe stove in a ditch near my house the next day.

After three days, I washed the baby with lukewarm water containing milk and pine needles.

After a few days of rest, I was expected to get up and resume housework. I washed my hands and face and burned incense to cleanse myself before doing chores.

My husband rarely cared for our children. I often carried my child on my back with a sash to do farm work and housework. Once the older siblings matured, they could alleviate my childcare burden.

After birth, I often woke up four to five times to breastfeed. I can't forget one evening just a few days after my second childbirth. Around midnight, my drunken husband and some of his friends returned home, drank beer, and made a lot of noise while I was caring for my elder daughter and my regularly crying infant. Later, I was told to get up and prepare food for them. I did it while caring for my infant, or my husband would have been angry and beaten me.

My husband went to the local monastery to ask an older respected monk for a name for my child. The monk would write the name on a piece of paper. After seven days, my husband unfolded the paper with the name and said the name in the baby's ear three times in an undertone.

When a child cried a lot, I melted lead in a ladle and circled the child's head with it to rid them of fear. I would also ask a *bla ma* or monk to divine. He usually suggested we chant certain scriptures, which was very useful. If those methods didn't work, we changed the child's name. For example, my younger daughter often cried, especially at night. When religious rituals for her didn't work, the tantric practitioner gave her a new name. She then became better.

I fed my children wheat flour soup from the second month. I breastfed my children until they were at least one and a half years old. When it was time for my children to first consume meat, I fed goat's tongue to my sons, which locals often say helps the child become a good speaker. I gave rabbit meat to my daughters to help them become more intelligent.

The most common thing we used at that time for dealing with infants' urine and feces was the *tha khug*. Ash in the bag absorbed the infant's urine. I changed the cloth diaper when the baby defecated, which is healthier than modern diapers.

We didn't have sanitary pads at that time. Women gradually used pieces of cloth when they wore pants. Soon after the placenta emerged, I sat and attached the warm placenta to my vagina to relieve the tearing pain. My mother-in-law gave this advice.

The placenta was retained after the birth of my third child, causing more agony. An experienced Chinese woman from another village eventually arrived and instructed me to lean against a bag of dry grass, rolled her palm on my belly, and told me to blow into an empty bottle. The placenta was then easily expelled. I would not be alive at this moment if not for her.

The local custom goes that the family should slaughter a sheep shortly after a woman gives birth to recuperate from physical fragility and have enough milk to breastfeed the newborn. Meat, mutton broth, and *rtsam pa* were the common foods I consumed after delivery. I avoided drinking and contacting cold water, commonly thought to lead to gynecological diseases and joint pain. But it was inevitable that I would contact cold water, so now I have a sore back and arthritis. I think it is because I lacked rest after birth.

Women mostly went to their natal homes to give birth, but I didn't because my husband and I had a separate house, and no women would replace me to do house chores, so I had to stay home.

ACCOUNT FOUR: SGROL MTSHO (b. 1968)

I was born in Bla brang¹ and raised by my aunt. My relatives arranged a marriage for me when I matured, but I fled. In 1990, I first met my current husband, who was with his friend in Bla brang. We planned to go to Lha sa, but we couldn't. We eventually went to my husband's community, staying at his friend's house. His father was a local leader, and the family owned a lot of sheep and goats. Once we arrived, the family welcomed us and slaughtered a sheep. My husband and I stayed there for several days, and I helped the family milk goats. I was initially surprised that goats' horns were tied together with rope for milking. I then imitated the women milking goats by stretching their hands between the goats' back legs to squeeze the teats.

Three days later, my husband's brother-in-law arrived on horseback with ornaments, two more horses, and two new robes. A local woman helped me dress in both robes and put on the silver adornments. I was a newly-arrived wife, so local

¹ Located in Bsang chu (Xiahe) County, Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

custom required I wear new robes and adornments. Afterward, we mounted horses and rode to the summer pasture residence of my husband's family.

After a few months at the summer pasture, I began suffering physical discomfort and protracted headaches. Finally, my husband and I rode horses to the township town hospital, where I was examined. I was told I was pregnant, explaining my pain and discomfort.

During my pregnancy, I mostly stayed in the pastoral area but occasionally went to the farming area to do farm work. I herded sheep, spun yarn for weaving, and softened sheepskins. This was difficult for me in the beginning. I used my hands to awkwardly recoat *sgo ra*¹ with mud to improve its appearance. I couldn't coat it as smoothly as my mother-in-law, leaving conspicuous handprints on the wall. My mother-in-law was not satisfied and scolded me for doing it poorly.

No one had told me about childbirth before my first delivery, so I knew nothing about it. I had a lot of fear the first time but less during my second and third deliveries.

I felt ill during my first pregnancy's third trimester, so my father-in-law rode a mule to the township town to get Tibetan medicine from the only Tibetan doctor there.

My abdomen ached intermittently for twenty days before giving birth. There was no midwife, I was often in pain, and nobody knew when I would give birth. My firstborn was premature. My in-laws slept in a yak-hair tent, while my husband and I slept nearby in a modest adobe house. My husband rubbed my back occasionally when I was in pain at night. It was the only thing he could do to alleviate my nightly discomfort and inability to sleep.

Persistent pain convinced my family I should visit the local township town hospital the next day. In excruciating pain and needing to urinate frequently, I was forced to lie and sit throughout labor. My husband, who was used to hearing my constant wailing, lay half asleep. Occasionally, he asked whether he should massage me.

¹ According to Tshe gzung skyid, it is a wall built at the front of the black yak-hair tent in winter to block cold wind from entering the tent. It was generally made with blocks of soil or sod blocks joined with dirt mixed with filtered horse dung. When the wall dried after three to four days, women used their palms to coat the wall with clay. The wall reached the edge of the interior surface of the tent and had the same width as the front part of the tent. The center of the wall had a cloth-covered gap for people moving in and out.

At midnight, while squeezing and enduring the pain, I sensed something come out of my body. My daughter was born without a cry. I couldn't see her since there was no light, and I dared not check on her. The pain disappeared instantly. I told my husband, and he called my mother-in-law. Later, something else came out. I moved away from it with no idea what it was. I was unsure of what to do. My mother-in-law arrived holding a *ting pra* 'oil lamp'¹ and without a sash around her robe.

She examined the newborn under the dim light and worriedly said, "It's a girl. I am not sure if she will live."

She cut the umbilical cord and covered the newborn in lambskin. She was smaller than normal infants and couldn't nurse for some time.

I had no milk shortly after birth, so my mother-in-law obtained breast milk from her daughter, who was breastfeeding her one-year-old son. A little ball of wool was dipped in milk and squeezed into my infant's mouth.

Widows and women whose children have died were not allowed to be midwives. Unlike my first delivery, women helped me in my later deliveries. I delivered on the ground covered with powdered sheep dung and an old sheepskin in front of the adobe stove. I stayed on it for seven days after delivery. The placenta and other discharges went on the powder while the placenta was placed to one side. The placenta was placed in a bag with dung powder and buried under ashes outside the house for three to seven days. It should be buried as deep as possible. Some children tend to vomit milk after breastfeeding, which is believed to be because the placenta is not buried deep enough.

The umbilical cord should be tied on both sides before being severed with scissors. It is risky if the mother's side is untied. This may cause excessive bleeding and inhibits the placenta from being expelled.

Once the placenta fell onto the dung powder after childbirth, I attached it to my vagina until it cooled to help me recover from vaginal tearing. I used cloth as a sanitary pad.

Only family members could contact my infant and me seven days after delivery. I resumed house chores ten days after delivery. I did not consume spices, cold water, or much salt for one month, fearing this would harm my health and my nursing child.

I was collecting firewood in a remote area during my third pregnancy

¹ *Ting pra* (CT). *Kar mye* (LT: *dkar me*) was also used. *Ting pra* refers to traditional lamps holding oil or melted fat that used cotton wicks.

when painful contractions began, so I quickly set out with my donkey loaded with the firewood I had gathered. I had a sharp pain on the way, so I sat on the ground and endured it as the donkey advanced. I hurried to catch up with it when the agony subsided.

My first two children were girls. The third was a boy. My father-in-law was excited when he knew it was a boy, offered *bsang*, and blew a conch. My father-in-law's brother, a knowledgeable monk, named all my children after seven days.

Children's hair is traditionally not trimmed until they reach the age of three. Two of my daughters were left with *ra ba* 'a tuft of hair braided into a little plait' symbolizing hope for a future sibling.

I used *tha khug* for the first two children but later used long fabric strips that can be recycled as diapers. When the children were around fourteen months old, I bought pants with an open crotch made by a Chinese woman from the neighboring village, which helped them urinate easily.

When children cried a lot, we used *khru chu* that a tantric practitioner or *bla ma* had blown on to wash the baby and chanted scriptures assigned by a diviner.

ACCOUNT FIVE: BZANG MO (b. 1987)

I was born and raised in a black yak-hair tent with five siblings. I anticipated attending school, but my parents refused, insisting I tend goat kids and calves. My two younger brothers attended school but quit after elementary school. When I was thirteen, I began to tend my family's livestock alone on collective pastureland while my parents did agricultural work in the farming area. We often used a cart drawn by a donkey or mule to fetch water from a remote place with running water in the herding area.

When I became an adult, my father, who is skilled at making Tibetan clothing, offered to teach me how to make garments and robes so I could run a small Tibetan clothing business in the township town. I was uninterested and continued herding livestock, which I enjoyed.

I married when I was twenty-seven. I have one child and look forward to having more children, but I can no longer become pregnant.

My mother gave birth in a black yak-hair tent, but I gave birth at a hospital in Mgo mang (Guomaying)¹ Township. I had two Ultrasound B tests during my

¹ Mgo mang is in the northwest of Mang ra County.

pregnancy.

My husband and I went to Bya khyung phag mo¹ at Bya khyung Monastery² when I realized I was pregnant. We offered a *kha btags* 'white silk scarf', one hundred RMB, and *snyan shal*.³ We asked for prayers and blessings for my unborn child. My husband and I knelt in front of the Bya khyung phag mo image, which was covered with cloth in a glass enclosure, while the monk manager said the prayers loudly for a few minutes. The monk later gave us a piece of bread and a folded paper with two names, one for a girl and another for a boy, bound with sacred red thread. I stored them in a case in a high space in our home shrine room.

An auspicious day was chosen after delivery. We unfolded the names paper and chose the girl's name for my daughter - 'Phag mo nor bu'. All the names given by Bya khyung phag mo are featured with the insertion of two syllables from the name-giver's name. After dipping the dried bread in hot water the same day, I ate it.

As my due date approached, I left my husband's home and returned to my natal home. My mother and I later leased a room near the hospital in the township town since my natal home was far from the hospital. We went there in advance to minimize health risks. We rushed to the hospital as labor started, and the water broke. My mother was not allowed in the delivery room. Soon after being attended by two nurses and a doctor, I gave birth to my daughter without much difficulty because I performed one hundred prostrations every day from the beginning of my pregnancy until the day of delivery. With the help of the physicians, I felt safe but timid and humiliated because it is culturally considered shameful to expose your vagina to anyone.

Today, we are fortunate to give birth in hospitals since we receive medication or IVs to prevent issues such as retained placenta or infection. I haven't had any gynecological health issues thus far, which I credit to the hospital delivery and the great care and rest I had after delivery. It costs 2,000 RMB with

¹ Bya khyung rdo rje phag mo is a supreme being with the power to save infants from death. Locals often asked for protection from this being, especially when a woman had experienced a stillbirth, and prayed for blessings and protection for the next child. Meanwhile, people visited to pray for a son before the pregnancy.

² According to Nian and Bai (1993:51), Bya khyung yon tan dar rgyas gling (Brag bya khyung/Bya khyung dgon ba) was located thirty-five kilometers in the west of Hualong Hui Autonomous County on Bya khyung Mountain. It was founded by Chos rje don grub rin chen in 1349.

³ A long strip of (yellow) fabric with patterns (dragons) offered to deities.

medical insurance. It is more expensive at hospitals located in major cities.

After three days of IVs at the hospital, I was discharged and spent one month at my natal home to rest and tend to my child while my mother and sister cared for me. I was very careful about my diet and health. I abstained from chili, garlic, spices, and cold water. I consumed black-sugar tea, *rtsam pa* soup, and mutton broth.

Doctors spoke Chinese to me during my delivery. I couldn't understand, so they got angry and scolded me, making me feel bad. It wasn't easy if we didn't understand Chinese in the hospital. They scolded my mother when my baby was born for not buying a wash tub to wash the baby.

People offered fruits, mutton, and cash to the doctors to ensure a good attitude and treatment during delivery and other treatment. We didn't do that, and maybe that's why they had a negative attitude toward me.

Another negative thing about hospital delivery was cutting the vagina with scissors and later sewing it. Many women complained about this. We all prefer to deliver the babies naturally without cutting.

Nowadays, no woman in the local community gives birth at home due to accessible transportation and advanced medical care in towns. Many women feel it is safe to give birth in a hospital where there is support from medical professionals in case of infection, excessive bleeding, or retained placenta, which have caused the death of many women. Since around 2010, women have been required to give birth in a hospital, or the newborn won't be able to obtain a birth certificate for household registration, which may cause a lot of inconvenience to the child.

On rare occasions, women who live in remote herding areas with geographical barriers accidentally have quick labor before they can reach a hospital. Women in the herding areas and those with heavy family burdens travel to the hospital only when labor begins. Conversely, women with formal education who work in urban areas are hospitalized in advance to wait for or induce labor. Some women receive routine hospital testing from the beginning of their pregnancies and participate in activities beneficial for giving birth. However, such examinations and activities are costly and less prevalent in the local community. Locals seldom opt for an epidural while giving vaginal birth despite potential discomfort.

The last time I was weeding in the fields with some women, they described difficulties they encountered in the hospital - linguistic and cultural challenges. One said, "Doctors spoke aggressively to me when I didn't

understand what they said and scolded me for not preparing things that are needed for the baby and the mother."

The practice of resting after childbirth is prevalent today in our community. Unlike in the past, nearly all women rest after giving birth. In the case of a herding woman who is occupied with household chores and when no other women are available to replace her, she is unlikely to take a long rest after giving birth. Postpartum rest depends on family circumstances and lifestyle.

Some traditional childbirth practices vanish once all the local women give birth in hospitals. Fewer people are concerned with traditional beliefs, such as serious health risks stemming from where the amniotic fluid is discarded, or the placenta is buried. However, some women said newborns have spots on their faces, are physically unwell, or often cry because they neglect the placenta or amniotic fluid in the hospital. Conventional solutions to the issue, such as providing *bsang* at the spot where the mother gave birth, are no longer possible. Though some traditions are vanishing, some continue to play important roles, such as consulting *bla ma* for rituals that should be performed before childbirth to ensure the safety of the mother and child, naming, and childcare. Dietary restrictions after delivery are comparable to the past. For example, it is believed that spicy foods, garlic, seasonings, and cold drinks harm the health of nursing mothers and their infants. Aside from that, locals continue to slaughter sheep for recuperation following a birth.

Based on what I've heard and my experiences as a local resident, Cesarean sections are uncommon among local illiterate women. Instead, it is typical for about four out of ten educated women who have a job in a local county, town, or city to have a C-section. Some do it to avoid labor contraction pain. Others do it because they believe vaginal birth will lead to vaginal cuts or impairment.

Local women mostly consider C-sections negatively since it weakens women physically and leads to various health concerns. Consequently, they insist on vaginal delivery though it is time-consuming and difficult.

ACCOUNT SIX: DPA' MTSO SKYID (b. 1993)

I was born and raised in my home community's herding area. I grew up herding goat kids and lambs. I had a chance to attend school at the age of nine. I graduated from Northwest Nationalities University and now work as a

kindergarten teacher in Stong skor Community, ¹ the herding community where my husband is from.

I delivered one child via Cesarean section in Khri ka County Hospital. I used pregnancy test papers to check whether I was pregnant. When positive, I went to the County Town Hospital for a B Ultrasound check. I visited obstetric doctors several times during my pregnancy for check-ups. During the third month, I had a four-dimensional Ultrasound of the fetus, and the doctor reported all was good. Some women had monthly check-ups. I didn't because I have heard and believed that too many examinations are bad for the baby.

I prepared clothes, quilts, diapers, and feeding bottles for my baby during my pregnancy.

I didn't do work requiring much physical strength during my pregnancy because I live in a large family with my parents-in-law, who are young, and my husband's brother and his wife. I was not needed for much physical work during my pregnancy. I helped cook, clean, and sometimes herded sheep in my family's fenced pastureland. I didn't need to care much about the sheep. My sister-in-law and I rented a room near the Jo khang Temple during my late pregnancy.² Every morning, I got up early to prostrate, circumambulate the religious assembly hall, and turn prayer wheels while chanting the Rje btsun sgrol ma³ and Dmigs brtse ma⁴ scriptures with my prayer beads every day. I also prayed to the Buddha to bless my baby and me during labor.

The doctor said the fetus lacked oxygen and recommended I breathe oxygen through an inhaler during my late pregnancy, so then inhaled oxygen for thirty minutes a day for about twenty days. I had delayed parturition, so the doctor asked me to take medication to induce delivery. I was hospitalized, had a physical examination, and took the prescribed drug. My labor contractions soon began. The intervals between contractions were long and continued for two days. The doctor

¹ Part of Mgo mang Township, Mang ra County.

² Founded by Sa paN kun dga' rgyal mtshan in 1244, the Jo khang/Jo jo lha khang was located in Khri ka County (Nian and Bai 1993:185). See Smith (2017:65) for a photo.

³ "Tara is a tantric meditation deity whose practice is used by practitioners of the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and understand outer, inner, and secret teachings about compassion and emptiness" (<https://bit.ly/3TAUEul> 18 October 2022).

⁴ "Aming at loving kindness, a prayer to Tsong kha pa" <https://bit.ly/3VLIUvQ> 18 October 2022.

advised me to have Cesarean delivery because it was not good for the baby to wait longer, and I reluctantly agreed.

It cost 4,500RMB with medical insurance to have a Cesarean section at Khri ka County Town Hospital. My siblings and relatives from my husband's family visited soon after delivery, and each gave me 20-300RMB, baby clothes, and fruit as gifts. My close friends sent red packets of 50-200RMB. It was reciprocal. They offered me gifts because I had gifted them when they gave birth.

I was allowed to leave the hospital after six days. The doctor had said I should rest for three months, but I rested for fifty days and gradually did some housework. I avoided consuming cold drinks and spicy food. Forty days after delivery, I had a physical check-up, and the doctor said the wound had recovered well.

The doctor said it was dangerous to become pregnant again soon after a C-section delivery and suggested I not become pregnant for two to three years. Three months after the delivery, I went to the hospital for a contraceptive ring.

I used commercial diapers for my baby but tried not to use too many because local women said wearing diapers frequently was detrimental to the baby's reproductive organs. That might be true because my daughter's vagina and the surrounding skin became red and seemed painful. I put her in diapers at night and when we left our home. In the daytime, I dressed her in open-crotch pants.

The first day after the C-section, the doctor told me not to consume any food. On the second day, I had a little porridge. Gradually I had chicken broth, yak bone soup, eggs, and sometimes vegetables to stay well nourished. My family also slaughtered a sheep and gave me blood sausages. My sister gave me a small bag of crushed *zwa khyig* 'nettles' and said it could help discharge bad things from the uterus, so I drank some of this after it was boiled with milk tea.

I breastfed my daughter until she was six months old and offered wheat flour-made soup from the second month since my breastmilk was insufficient. After weaning, I fed her milk diluted with water in a feeding bottle. I tried to add less milk since too much milk made her constipated, and then I used enemas or drugs to help her defecate. I introduced adult food in the fifth month and gradually increased the amount.

Today, there is an emerging phenomenon of young mothers having less breast milk than their mothers. Local women explain this as the result of consuming various carbonated beverages and junk food containing chemical additives. Besides, some young mothers try not to breastfeed their babies because it makes their breasts sag.

CONCLUSION

The cultural and religious practices and beliefs about childbirth described in this essay typify Bon skor Community. However, some details are not necessarily consistent with every family's custom. Families have different perspectives and conditions on, for instance, dietary restrictions, divinations during pregnancy, and postnatal care.

Many customs and practices associated with childbirth are disappearing as women increasingly give birth in hospitals. Divination continues to play a pivotal role in modern society. A diviner or *bla ma* is consulted to learn the hospital the expectant mother should go to for childbirth and what religious rituals should be done for the safety of the mother and the infant.

Giving birth in hospitals has prevented the death of many women from retained placenta, infection, and excessive bleeding after childbirth, which were huge concerns for women in the past.

In 2022, all local women will give birth at a hospital. This has become compulsory due to concerns about home labor's risks and obtaining a birth certificate for family registration. Moreover, widespread hospital delivery has persuaded locals to go to healthcare centers even though some have economic barriers. Being an exception would precipitate negative reactions or gossip. For example, the family is mean and stingy, not caring about the daughter-in-law's health.

According to my consultants, vaginal delivery at a local county town hospital cost around 4,000 RMB, half of which was covered by medical insurance. A C-section cost 8,500RMB in total, of which the family paid 4,500. The rest was covered by medical insurance. Real costs varied depending on the woman's health condition. She might have been asked to transfer to a provincial hospital, where expenses were often higher because of the advanced medical facilities and more highly specialized medical workers.

Furthermore, it is inevitable for local people to encounter linguistic barriers. Medical workers are Chinese and only speak Chinese, while many local women are illiterate and don't know Chinese, creating communication challenges. There are also

cultural barriers regarding diet and caring for the baby. Locals mainly consume barley flour instead of vegetables, porridge, and vegetables suggested by doctors. Local women tend to sleep with their babies, while doctors recommend sleeping separately.

Young generations rarely know how their previous generations gave birth, preferring contemporary childbirth practices they consider safer and more hygienic. C-sections are increasingly common among young women, partly because they believe vaginal delivery leads to vaginal cuts and impairments. Moreover, young mothers increasingly do not breastfeed their children since some lack breast milk while some are concerned about breast shape beauty. Mothers increasingly feed their babies milk powder and cow or yak milk.

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TIBETAN TERMS

'bru khral འབྲུ་ཁྲལ་

'byor med yar langs

འབྱོར་མེད་ཡར་ལངས།

'dzong khug འཛོལ་ཁུག

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

a rig lha khang ཨ་རིག་ལྷ་ཁང་།

bang chu བང་ཅུ།

bang lud བང་ལུད།

bang rtsag བང་རུས།

bla brang བླ་བརྟ།

bla ma བླ་མ།

bon po zhing kha བོན་པོ་ཟིང་ཀམ།

bon skor བོན་སྐོར།

brag bya khyung བག་བྱ་ཁྱུང་།

bsang བསང་།

bsang chu བསང་ཅུ།

bsod nams rab brtan

བསོད་ནམས་རབ་བརྟན།

btsun kho བཙུན་ཁོ།

bu rogs བུ་རོགས།

bya khyung dgon ba

བྱ་ཁྱུང་དགོན་པ།

bya khyung rdo rje phag mo

བྱ་ཁྱུང་རྡོ་རྗེ་ཕག་མོ།

bya khyung yon tan dar rgyas

gling བྱ་ཁྱུང་ཡོན་ཏན་དར་རྒྱས་ལྷིང་།

bya mdo བྱ་མདོ།

byams skyid བྱམས་སྐྱིད།

bzang mo བཟང་མོ།

bzo zhing བཟོ་ཞིང་།

chos rje don grub rin chen

ཆོས་རྗེ་དོན་གྲུབ་རིན་ཆེན།

chu dkar dkar ཅུ་དཀར་དཀར།

chu nag nag ཅུ་ནག་ནག།

chu ring ཅུ་རིང་།

dbab sha དབབ་ཤ།

dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།

dkar me དཀར་མེ།

dmigs brtse ma དམིགས་བརྩེ་མ།

dpa' mtsho skyid དཔའ་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།

gces ming གཅེས་མིང་།

gcod pa གཙོད་པ།

gri sha གྲི་ཤ།

grib གྲིབ།

gsang sgrog གསང་སྒྲོག

gser chen གསེར་ཆེན།

gser gdung གསེར་གདུང་།

gzhug གཞུག (CT)

jo jo lha khang ཇོ་ཇོ་ལྷ་ཁང་།

jo khang ཇོ་ཁང་།

kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།

kar mye ཀར་མྱེ། (CT)

kho tshe ཁོ་ཙེ།

khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

khrus chu ཁྲུས་ཅུ།

klu mo tshe ring ལུ་མོ་ཙེ་རིང་།

lab rtse ལཔ་རེ།

lag ljibs ལག་ལྗེབས།

lha sa ལྷ་ས།

lha mtsho ལྷ་མཚོ།

rgyu sha རྒྱུ་ཤ།

ma Ni མ་ཏི།

mal gro gung dkar

མལ་གྲོ་གུང་དཀར།

mang ra མང་ར།

mgo log མགོ་ལོག

mgo mang མགོ་མང་།

mi dmangs gung hre

མི་དམངས་གུང་རྩེ།

mgo mang མགོ་མང་།

mo khyim མ་ཁྲིམ།
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།
 nangchakja/snying
 lcags rgyal ལྷམ་རྒྱལ་རྒྱལ།
 nga brgyad lo'i zing 'khrug
 ང་བརྒྱད་ལོའི་ཟིང་འཁྲུག།
 phag mo nor bu ཕག་མོ་ནོར་བུ།
 pho khyim ཕོ་ཁྲིམ།
 rdo rje dpal 'byor
 རྩོའི་དཔལ་འབྱོར།
 rdo sbis རྩོ་སྒྲིལ།
 rje btsun sgröl ma རྩེ་བཅུན་སྒྲོལ་མ།
 rje tsong kha ba རྩེ་ཙོང་ཁ་བ།
 rma chu རྩ་ཆུ།
 rmu thag རྩུ་ཐག།
 rtsam pa རུས་པ།
 sa paN kun dga' rgyal mtshan
 ས་པཎ་ཀུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
 sgröl mtsho སྒྲོལ་མཚོ།
 sgo ra སྒོ་ར།
 skal bzang tshe brtan
 སྐལ་བཟང་ཚེ་བརྟན།
 sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།
 sku 'bum byams pa gling
 སྐུ་འབུམ་བྱམས་པ་གླིང་།
 skyid dung སྐྱིད་དུང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Baochandaohu 包产到户
 dui 队
 Gannan 甘南
 gongfen 工分
 Gonghe 共和
 Guide 贵德
 Guinan 贵南

snyan shal སྐན་ཤལ།
 srog blu སྐྱག་ལུ།
 srung 'khor སྐྱང་འཁོར།
 srung rtags སྐྱང་རྟགས།
 stong skor སྐྱང་སྐོར།
 tha khug ཐཱ་ཁུག།
 thab ka ཐབ་ཀ།
 thang dkar ma ཐང་དཀར་མ།
 ting pra ཐིང་པ།
 tsong kha ཙོང་ཁ།
 tshal rnga ཐཤ་རྩ།
 tshe blu ཐཤུ།
 tshe chang ཐཤ་ཆང་།
 tshe dbang ཐཤ་དབང་།
 tshe gzungs skyid ཐཤ་གཟུངས་སྐྱིད།
 tshe sgrub ril bu ཐཤ་སྐྱབ་རིལ་བུ།
 tshe thar ཐཤ་ཐར།
 yul lha ཡུལ་ལྷ།
 za ma dka ngal gyi dus
 ཟ་མ་དཀའ་ངལ་གྱི་དུས།
 zha nye skor ba ཟ་ཉེ་སྐོར་བ།
 zhing sa sger la bgo ba
 ཟིང་ས་སྐེར་ལ་བཞོ་བ།
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།
 zog lug sger la bgo ba
 ཟོག་ལུག་སྐེར་ལ་བཞོ་བ།
 zwa khyig ཟུའིག།

Guoluo 果洛
 Guomaying 过马营
 Hainan 海南
 Hualong 化隆
 Huangzhong 湟中
 Hui 回
 jiezha 结扎

Longyangxia 龙羊峡

liangshui 粮税

Mozhugongka 墨竹工卡

mu 亩

Qinghai 青海

Qurang 曲让

renmin gongshe 人民公社

Salar, Sala 撒拉

Shagou 沙沟

Tanggemu 塘格木

Wangshenke 汪什科

Wenchangjia 文昌加

Xiahe 夏河

Xining 西宁

Xunhua 循化

PERSPECTIVES

"YAK HERDERS ARE THE COSMIC SUN":
A MGO LOG HERDSWOMAN'S SINGING LIFE (2022)
Gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་ཤྭ་རྩིན་ལས། (Gerichengli 格日成立)*

ABSTRACT

This text describes the singing life of Phur 'tsho (b. 1960), a herder born in the contemporary Khang sar (Kangsai) Town, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Phur 'tsho learned songs from her mother, friends, and the radio. She sang while herding calves and yaks with her herdmates. She moved to a new home in Smin thang (Mentang) Township after her mother and maternal uncle arranged her marriage in 1976.

KEYWORDS

Tibetan women singing, Himalayan pastoral songs, Golok yak-hair tent, Qinghai herdswomen songs

Mountaintops shrouded in clouds pierced the sky on the horizon. An eagle searching for food soared above yaks, horses, and sheep, calmly grazing on the banks of a creek that twisted and turned through the grassland like a dragon.

Three riders on two yaks passed by a thawing lake. Phur 'tsho sat behind her mother on a polled, black yak. Phur 'tsho's aunt rode a brown yak. Phur 'tsho tapped her mother's back from the discomfort caused by sitting on the yak's spine. Phur 'tsho's mother ignored her and began singing as they rode by grazing yaks that looked up in surprise, their ears twitching, grass stems hanging from their mouths, and watching and listening, mesmerized by a piercingly sharp melody that seemed to reach the ends of the earth and somehow, for a short time, seemed to answer all the problems any sentient creature was capable of having.

Phur 'tsho forgot her discomfort and wrapped her arms

* Gu ru 'phrin las. 2023. "Yak Herders are the Cosmic Sun." A Mgo Log Herdsman's Singing Life (2022). *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:257-264.

around her mother. She leaned her head against her mother's back and announced, "Mom! I want to be a singer just like you!" when the song ended.

Her aunt smiled and looked at Phur 'tsho, who smiled back.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD LIFE

Phur 'tsho (b. 1964) was born in the Hor skor (Huoerguo) Tribe, Khang sar (Kangsai) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Phur 'tsho's mother, Bo gces (b. 1923-2021), was the mother of four sons (Sran mgo, b. 1951; Zla po, 1953-2019; 'Jam mgon, b. 1955; and 'Tshogs po, b. 1957-2022) and three daughters (Phur 'tsho; Ma 'jug, b. 1966; and 'Da' mo, b. 1970). Phur 'tsho was her fifth child. Her father passed away in 1965.

During Phur 'tsho's childhood, Hor skor Dus chung¹ consisted of about ten households, two leaders, and an accountant who organized the brigade, offering jobs to brigade members over fifteen. All local families lived in yak-hair tents. Phur 'tsho's family lived in a small tent inherited from Bo gces' parents. Men herded yaks, sheep, and horses, while women milked and produced dairy products. From May to September, Bo gces milked twice daily and made butter and other dairy products.

Leaders visited each household, taking from each family a quota of dairy products and livestock each was required to produce. Households were given yaks and sheep to slaughter to provide meat and dairy products. The amount depended on household size. A family of six was given three yaks and three sheep (one yak and one sheep per two family members). Locals typically slaughtered yaks in the eleventh lunar month and sheep in the sixth or seventh lunar month.

The leaders and accountant were responsible for selling brigade livestock and dairy products in Gcig sgril County Town.

¹ CT=Colloquial Tibetan; LT=Literary Tibetan. CT: *dus chung* (LT: *ru chung*) = Ch: *xiaodui* 'small brigade' 'production team'. Communes consisted of *ru chen* 'big brigades' that were further divided into *dus chung*. Hereafter, I use "brigade" for *dus chung*.

They were accompanied by two or three young male brigade members who helped herd the livestock to the government slaughterhouse, where a Muslim butcher was paid to kill the animals.

The slaughterhouse paid thirty RMB each for big yaks and fifteen RMB each for small yaks and sheep. The sellers skinned the dead animals.

Cheese and butter were sold to the County Town Bureau of Livestock Husbandry. One kilogram of butter sold for one to two RMB, and one kilogram of cheese sold for four to eight RMB. The sales value was paid to each brigade household after deducting the meat and dairy products that had earlier been allocated to each household.

Phur 'tsho's family had four neighbors who were relatives, including her maternal uncle's (Don grub, 1931-1990) family. The four families mutually assisted each other, and the families' children often played and herded yak calves together.

Bo gces was responsible for milking twenty yaks and helped a neighbor milk the twenty yaks she had been assigned. Bo gces' family was not responsible for herding sheep.

Her son, Zla po, herded twenty yaks while her oldest son, Sran mgo, was a tractor driver for Khang sar Township and transported goods. Phur 'tsho helped the youngest son, 'Tshogs po, herd calves and yaks.

Bo gces, Zla po, and Sran mgo each received 0.10 RMB per day as payment for their work. Phur 'tsho and her other siblings were under fifteen and had no jobs.

'Jam mgon was given to his maternal aunt, who could not give birth. He herded yak calves for his adopted family.

Locals wore sheepskin robes and leather boots. Bo gces would bury dried yak skins. Unearth them when they were soft, cut the leather into pieces of appropriate size and shape, and sew them together with yak leather string using an awl and needle to make boots for her children.

Don grub herded sheep. He kept the skin of sheep killed by wolves and those that had died from illness and sewed the skins into robes for his children and Phur 'tsho's children.

Phur 'tsho's family's main food was roasted barley flour, butter, cheese, milk, and yogurt. Bo gces roasted barley in a metal pot on the adobe stove and ground it with a stone mill.

Sran mgo bought items such as barley, flour, salt, pots, scoops, bowls, long underwear, shirts, and scarves at the township town for his family from his family's salary.

HERDING LIFE

At seven, Phur 'tsho cared for her younger sisters and helped her mother fetch water, collect yak dung for fuel, and cook. Sometimes, she herded her family's calves with 'Tshogs po and neighboring children who also herded their families' calves. Phur 'tsho played with her herding mates, who sang while they herded together. This motivated Phur 'tsho to learn some songs, so Bo gces taught her to sing in return for her fetching water and herding calves. Phur 'tsho was passionate about learning new songs and also learned songs from neighboring older female relatives.

Phur 'tsho's friends would ask Bo gces to allow Phur 'tsho to spend the night at their home, and Bo gces typically agreed. Phur 'tsho enjoyed spending nights at her friends' tents because she could learn new songs while listening to elders sing in the tents.

Phur 'tsho learned this herding song from older women during these years.

TEXT AS PERFORMED

¹ནོར་ལ་ནག་ཁུང་ཇ་མགོའི་ཟེལ་བ་རེད།

²འདིའི་ལ་ནོར་ཇི་འཇམ་སྒྲིང་ཉི་མ་རེད།

³ལྷག་ལ་ལག་ག་ནམ་མཁའི་སྐར་མ་རེད།

⁴འདིའི་ལ་ལྷག་ཇི་བཙུང་ལྷའི་དུང་ཟླ་རེད།

⁵རྟ་ལ་འདྲོ་བ་མཚོ་ཁའི་མེ་ཉྒྱག་རེད།

⁶འདིའི་ལ་རྟ་ཇི་མཚོ་ནང་ནོར་བྱ་རེད།

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

¹མྱ་ནག་ཚུང་ཇུ་མགོའི་བེལ་བ་རེད།

²དེའི་མྱ་རྒྱུ་འཇམ་མཐོང་ཉི་མ་རེད།

³ལྷག་ལག་ག་ནམ་མཁའི་སྐར་མ་རེད།

⁴དེའི་ལྷག་རྒྱུ་བཙུག་ལྷ་མོ་རེད།

⁵རྟ་འདྲ་བ་མཚོ་ཁོང་གི་རྟ་རེད།

⁶དེའི་རྟ་རྒྱུ་མཚོ་ནང་མྱ་བ་རེད།

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

¹Black yaks are dew on mountain peaks' grassy tops

²Yak herders are the cosmic sun

³Yearlings are glittering stars in the sky

⁴Shepherds are the milky full moon

⁵Horses are colorful flowers on the lake banks

⁶Horse-herders are the lake's inner jewel

In 1972, Zla po bought a rectangular black radio from the County Town, and the family listened to news and songs broadcast by the Mtsho sngon Tibetan Radio Station. Phur 'tsho and her siblings listened to a radio broadcast each night at nine PM. She was only interested in the singing part of the broadcast when different singers sang various songs. Songs that had been broadcast earlier were sometimes rebroadcast.

Zla po slept alone in a small sod-brick room covered with willow branches near the family tent and would take the radio with him when he went to bed. If he went to bed early, Phur 'tsho would ask Zla po to loan her his radio so she could listen to songs, and he usually agreed. Phur 'tsho would put the radio next to her pillow and listen. News bored her, but she forced herself to listen, fearful of missing the songs. She turned off the radio a few times when boredom set in and then discovered she had missed the singing part once she turned the radio back on. Her family had no watches or clocks, so it was easy to miss a set time.

She learned this song from listening to the radio.

TEXT AS PERFORMED

¹འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་མགོ་རི་མགོ་སྐྱོན་ལྷན་རེད།

²དྲི་ནི་ཞེས་པ་ལ་ཆེའི་ར་གུར་ཀྱམ་རེད།

³འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་སྐད་རི་སྐད་མེ་ཉྑལ་རེད།

⁴སྐྱུ་ནི་ཡག་པ་མེ་ཉྑལ་མེར་ཆེན་རེད།

⁵འདིའི་ནི་རྩ་ཞོལ་རི་ཞོལ་རྩ་འགོ་རེད།

⁶རྩ་ནི་ཡག་པ་འཛམ་གླིང་གསོས་རྩ་རེད།

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

¹འདིའི་རྩ་མགོ་རི་མགོ་སྐྱོན་ལྷན་རེད།

²དྲི་ཞེས་པ་ལ་ཆེའི་གུར་ཀྱམ་རེད།

³འདིའི་རྩ་སྐད་རི་སྐད་མེ་ཉྑལ་རེད།

⁴སྐྱུ་ཡག་པ་མེ་ཉྑལ་མེར་ཆེན་རེད།

⁵འདིའི་རྩ་ཞོལ་རི་ཞོལ་རྩ་འགོ་རེད།

⁶རྩ་ནི་ཡག་པ་འཛམ་གླིང་འབྲུང་རྩ་རེད།

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

¹Medicinal herbs cover mountaintops

²Kha che's saffron emits fragrant perfume

³Various flowers bloom on mountain-sides

⁴The marsh marigold is the most beautiful

⁵The mountain foot is rich with springs

⁶The cleanest spring – drinking water for the universe

A MISSING RADIO

Zla po could read and write Tibetan and had basic math knowledge, so he became the tribe accountant in about 1974. He calculated each worker's annual salary and recorded each female worker's dairy products. Each year, the tribe leaders and the accountant calculated the amount of dairy products the tribe produced and sold annually and divided the unsold dairy products among brigade members. He wrote a receipt for each family. Each family's head or a family member could take the receipt and get the allocation from the home of a leader who temporarily stored dairy products in their homes.

Once, Zla po's friend, Nyi ma, came to see him to get the receipt for his family. They chatted in the sod-brick room and listened to the radio. Later, Zla po invited his friend to his family tent for a meal. Afterward, feeling tired, Zla po took a short nap. He invited Nyi ma to spend the night at his home, but Nyi ma said he had to return home.

The next day Zla po discovered his radio was missing and also discovered Nyi ma's footprints near the door of his room. Convinced his friend had stolen the radio, he rode a horse to Nyi ma's family, dismounted, and called Nyi ma, who soon came and assured him he had not stolen the radio. Zla po was embarrassed when his friend swore he had not stolen the radio. He trusted Nyi ma and apologized. Nyi ma forgave him and invited him to his home.

The following day, while herding calves, 'Tshogs po opened a bag he discovered in a marmot burrow and found Zla po's radio and a piece of paper. He couldn't read, so he didn't know what was written on the paper. That night, he gave Zla po the bag and paper. Zla po recognized the paper as the receipt for Nyi ma's family he had written two days earlier. He angrily believed he had been lied to and wanted revenge. However, Nyi ma's uncle, Zla po's friend, apologized on behalf of Nyi ma, so he forgave Nyi ma.

Phur 'tsho was delighted with the radio's return and resumed listening to the radio every night, learning more songs. She never forgot that time of the missing radio because she had heard no songs for two days and had been terribly dejected.

MARRIAGE

Bo gces and one of her cousins arranged a marriage for Phur 'tsho when she turned seventeen. Bo gces asked another cousin to consult a local high-ranking *bla ma* to divine the marriage's suitability. The *bla ma* pronounced it was a good marriage, and Phur 'tsho would have a happy life. Bo gces then agreed to the marriage. Phur 'tsho, like other girls, followed her mother and uncle's suggestion.

On an auspicious day, Phur 'tsho wore the outfit her mother had given her: a new sheepskin robe and a silver belt inlaid with coral. Phur 'tsho and Zla po then rode horses to her future husband's home. Looking back at her home Phur 'tsho saw Bo gces watching them leave.

In 2022, Phur 'tsho occasionally sang when she herded and searched for missing yaks.

TIBETAN TERMS

'jam mgon འཇམ་མགོན།

'tshogs po འཚོགས་པ།

bo gces བོ་གཅེས།

bun khrang བུན་ཁང་།

don grub རྟོན་གུབ།

dus chung དུས་ཅུང་། (CT)

hor skor ཧོར་སྐོར།

gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།

golok, mgo log གཤོ་ལོག་

gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

khang sar ཁང་སར།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

nyi ma ཉེ་མ།

phur 'tsho ཕུར་འཚོ།

ru chen རུ་ཅེན།

ru chung རུ་ཅུང་།

sran mgo སྐར་མགོ།

zla po ཟླ་པ།

CHINESE TERMS

Gerichengli 格日成立

Guoluo 果洛

Huoerguo 霍尔果

Jiuzhi 久治

Kangsai 康赛

Qinghai 青海

LIVELIHOODS, DEVELOPMENT, AND ECO-COSMOLOGY IN YUNNAN, PR CHINA: PERSPECTIVES OF AN ETHNIC HANI MAN

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ABSTRACT

Based on fieldwork in China's Yunnan Province, this essay follows Mr. Wang, an ethnic Hani man from Ruili, a lowland town bordering Myanmar, where he worked for Mr. Zhou, a Han Chinese businessman, to his mountain village in Yuanyang, where he farms. I first describe how Zhou's risky economic schemes in Ruili led to conflicts that induced Wang to return to his mountain village. Second, I consider how development processes such as road construction may impact livelihoods and cosmology in Wang's mountain village. I employ a descriptive ethnographic style but make two analytical points. First, the essay highlights how power and resources are sometimes unequally distributed between lowland Han Chinese and highland ethnic minority people in Yunnan. Second, it suggests materials used in ritual worship may serve as mnemonics that, for highland ethnic Hani villagers, present cultural and ecological pasts in the face of current ecological and social transformations.

KEYWORDS

Yunnan, Hani, livelihoods, development, cosmology

It is hot here in the valley, with the thermometer in the car reading thirty-seven degrees Celsius. I am riding with three ethnic Hani¹

* Henrik Kloppenborg Møller. 2023. Livelihoods, Development, and Eco-cosmology in Yunnan, PR China: Perspectives of an Ethnic Hani Man. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:265-286.

¹ Numbering 1.7 million (<https://unc.live/2Yy9x9F> 2 September 2021), the Hani are one of China's fifty-six recognized ethnic groups. They are believed to be descendants of people, who migrated southward from the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau prior to the third century CE. Today, more than ninety percent of China's Hani live in Yunnan Province. Hani groups also live in Laos, Vietnam, eastern Myanmar, and northern Thailand. The

men in a car alongside the Honghe 'Red River' as it cuts through the valley here in Yuanyang County of Yunnan's Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture before entering northern Vietnam. The Red River gets its name from the red soil sediments it carries. But as sediments have accumulated due to dam building upriver, the river is no longer red here. In some stretches, the riverbed is exposed due to water diversion. The men in the car say the river once held rich fish stocks, but there are few fish after dam building.

As we ascend the mountain, the temperature cools. It is a three-hour drive from Nansha, the Yuanyang County capital, located in the valley, to our mountain village destination. A new highway under construction will reduce the time, which excites the driver, Mr. Li.¹ The new road will make transport of agricultural products from the mountain to buyers in the lowland faster and might also attract more tourists to the villages, he says. The famous Duoyishu Rice Terraces² draw many tourists, and villagers run guesthouses and restaurants close to scenic viewpoints.

However, the Duoyishu Rice Terraces are on a mountain adjacent to the one we ascend now, which sees very few tourists. Mr. Wang, who sits in the back of the car, cultivates corn, which he feeds his pigs, chicken, pigeons, and ducks and uses to make fiery corn liquor. He makes a batch of one hundred liters of corn liquor at a time and sells it to tourists and buyers from the lowland, especially around the Chinese New Year holidays. The liquor business earns him 20,000-30,000 RMB a year, and he figures that more tourists to the villages could increase his sales.³

In our private talks, however, Mr. Wang is not as excited as Mr. Li about the changes that development projects and processes

Hani language belongs to the Lolo-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Most young Hani in Yunnan also speak Chinese, and the research for this essay was done in Chinese.

¹ All names and some factual details have been altered to assure anonymity for the interlocutors featured in this essay.

² The Duoyishu Rice Terraces were carved on steep mountain slopes over the past 1,300 years, and were listed as an UNESCO Heritage Site in 2013.

³ The exchange rate was approximately 1 Chinese RMB to 0.16 USD and 0.12 EURO at this time.

bring to his village. For example, the completion of a new, paved road has led villagers to abandon their houses to build new ones next to the new road. The new houses are constructed partly with borrowed money. Most young village residents leave for the cities in lowland eastern China to labor for the money needed to pay off their loans. Their children are left behind with their grandparents in the village. Moreover, prospects of economic mobility embedded in development processes could intensify farming, animal husbandry, mining, construction, and pollution on the mountain. In turn, this is likely to harm local ecologies and thereby also impact local cosmologies that make sense of these ecologies.

Based on my engagements with Wang from 2013 to 2018, the following ethnographic essay considers how livelihoods, development processes, ecologies, and cosmologies can be mutually conditioned. Wang's accounts are assembled into a narrative that presents his positioned perspectives. It should be noted that highlighting the perspectives of other interlocutors, such as Zhou, would have created a different narrative account. Focusing primarily on one interlocutor's subjective experiences may impede formal generalization compared to ethnographic accounts based on the narratives of multiple interlocutors. However, the personal narrative approach ideally allows for a more in-depth rendering of that interlocutor's livelihood strategies and personal experiences as they unfold over time and in different environments.

While employing a descriptive ethnographic style, the essay points to asymmetrical power relations between lowland and highland populations in Yunnan. It also suggests that certain materials, such as those used in ritual worship, may help highland ethnic Hani villagers imagine cultural and ecological pasts in the face of changes in their communities and mountain environments.

WILD CAPITALISM IN RUILI

I met Wang in 2013 in Ruili, a border town in the Dehong Prefecture of China's Yunnan Province, neighboring Myanmar. At that time, Wang worked for Mr. Zhou, a Han Chinese man, who operated a company that supplied Ruili's hotels, restaurants, KTVs, and

nightclubs with beer, wine, and hard liquor. In 2010, Zhou came to Wang's mountain village in Yuanyang to engage in a then-thriving gold mining business, which is how he met Wang. Zhou contracted miners, whose labor he leased out to mining companies. But the business venture turned out bad for Zhou, who left for Ruili, broke. In Ruili, Zhou set up an alcohol company, acquired loans and investments from different partners, and contracted workers with the promise of good salaries and learning experiences.

One investor was Zhang, a seventeen-year-old local girl from Ruili. Zhou first hired Zhang and two other local women to contact the owners of bars, restaurants, and KTVs in Ruili as potential buyers of his beer and alcohol brands. He also asked them to find suitable local premises to open a bar as part of the company. Zhou discovered that Zhang's paternal aunt was rich and had a soft spot for Zhang because her daughter had passed away, and he started to persuade Zhang to borrow money from her aunt to invest in the company. Zhou was well-spoken and persuasive, and he promised a high investment return because Ruili's entertainment industry was booming due to the cross-border jade trade, which brought many wealthy businesspeople to the border town. When I first got to know Zhang, she was reading a book that Zhou had given her. The book offered advice for self-development and how to do business in China. At that time, Zhang saw Zhou as a benevolent teacher who would help her gain practical business experience. Zhou's presentation of his alcohol company made her feel it would be a lucrative business.

Zhou eventually convinced Zhang to borrow 400,000 RMB from her aunt to invest in his alcohol company. Zhou also asked Wang to come to Ruili to work for him. Wang and Zhang are ethnic Hani, and they became friends in Ruili. They discovered that Zhang's 400,000 RMB had vanished from Zhou's company account. Wang felt it was despicable that Zhou would cheat a girl of her family's money and seek to restore her funds. Wang worked as a company driver, transporting liquor cases to clients around town and sometimes across the border to Myanmar on a three-wheeled motorbike with a truck bed. He put some money into Zhang's account when he received payment. Over time, Wang returned all

of the 400,000 RMB to Zhang. Zhou did not immediately find out. He was busy acquiring new loans. He made Wang fabricate fake receipts and account figures so that the company seemed to have plenty of capital and stock to be used as collateral for the loans.

At this time, Zhou was thin, had a crew cut, and was in his mid-forties. He often invited me to drink tea with him beside a carved teak-tree table in his company office. Zhou is from eastern China's Henan Province. He said he subscribed to four cardinal values that comprise the Han Chinese character and spirit; *renyi* 'benevolence', *li* 'etiquette', *zhi* 'wisdom', and *xin* 'genuineness'.

One evening he said, "We Chinese do not work as individuals. My company is like a family. I am like a tree with many branches," while clenching his fist. "In the West, you are individuals," he continued, putting his five fingers on the table. The principle was that a close-knit network of (fictive) family members, symbolized by the closed fist, is stronger than an assembly of individuals, as symbolized by the freestanding fingers. Zhou often complained that locals in Ruili "do not have culture," referring to an idealized Han Chinese high culture rather than everyday practices. "We Han Chinese help and teach the ethnic minorities," he said, "but some of them are very closed-minded. They have a lot of resources, but they don't know how to use them. Locals here are lazy," he continued, "but I hire locals so they can learn about business, and how to develop their thinking."

Zhou's narratives almost invariably began with him arriving broke in Ruili and working his way up in the local business world with stamina and perseverance. First, Zhou acquired a license to be the sole supplier of the Dutch beer brand Heineken in Ruili and then expanded with other imported beer, wine, and liquor brands. Soon he was employing a handful of staff. He then opened a bar with a forty percent stake, while Zhang and another local girl each owned thirty percent. But Zhou appropriated all the profits. He never worked at the bar but came by every night to drink beer and gave his friends and associates free beer. After a year, the bar closed in debt.

Several months later, Zhou told me about his mining venture in the Yuanyang Mountains. His friend had opened an

unauthorized gold mine there, and Zhou hired locals as miners. But after a conflict, the workers mutinied and took over the mine. Zhou did not specify the nature of the conflict or its aftermath.

While accessing Zhou's personal story and feelings was hard, I directly connected with Zhang and Wang. Through them, I could see an image of Zhou very different from the image he tried to project of a Confucian gentleman. "I do not want to give you a bad impression of Zhou," Wang once said. "Deep inside, I do not think he is a bad person. But Zhou is not happy. He does not communicate with the heart. He talks, but he does not listen. It is hard for him to get close to people."

I thought about how Zhou often raised his glass in a toast, saying, "To happiness," but Zhou did not look happy when he made that toast for happiness.

One evening, Wang came by my room looking tired. I asked him how he was, and he talked for three hours, describing the disappearance of Zhang's money from Zhou's company account and his work to retrieve it. Zhou blamed Wang for the company account being empty. He had not paid Wang his salary for months and said Wang must pay back the money he had put into Zhang's account.

Zhou threatened that his *hei shehui* 'black society' friends would hurt Wang. He had also called people in Wang's village in Yuanyang and told them that Wang had stolen his money. Finally, he threatened to hurt Wang's family if he did not pay off the debt or if he told anybody that Zhou's company had no money.

"I want to leave the company," Wang said, "but Zhou will not let me go. I know too much about his business. Zhou has big problems. He borrowed more than one million RMB from various loan sharks. But they do not know that Zhou borrowed money from other loan sharks."

Zhou seemed engaged in a dangerous game, borrowing money from one loan shark to pay off debts to another, and so on. For example, Wang told me that Zhou owed 600,000 RMB to a businessman in Ruili and that this man had threatened to cut off Zhou's hand if he did not return the money within a week. Desperate, Zhou asked for help from a local jade trader, who went to the businessman and said, "Harming Zhou will not get your

money back. Wait a bit. I'll give you a nice piece of jade. Keep it until Zhou pays back the money."

"Zhou even borrowed 400,000 RMB from his sister," Wang continued, "but he did not pay back the money, and his sister lost her house."

A few months earlier, Wang's wife had come down from the mountain village in Yuanyang to work in Zhou's company in Ruili. Zhou had promised to pay her 1,500 RMB monthly to clean and cook but had not yet paid her. After working hard for many months, Wang made his first trip home for the Chinese New Year. "I cannot even afford to buy clothes for my children," he lamented.

Also, Zhou's threats had gotten to him: "I am not afraid of Zhou," he said, "but Zhou says he will send the black society people to my village to hurt my family, so what can I do?"

Wang's account of Zhou's borrowing spree led me to recall how Zhou had tried to use me to back up his creditworthiness in the black lending market in Ruili. Zhou asked me to come to his company's office one night. When I arrived, he was seated by the tea table opposite a young man, who immediately began asking me: How long had I known Zhou? How did I know him? How would I characterize our relationship? What was my job? How much did I earn? I got unpleasant vibes from this man who revealed little about himself besides being from Fujian Province.

This young man then questioned Zhou about his alcohol business. Zhou talked about his clients and the characteristics of various imported alcohol brands while adding cultural capital to his persona with classical Chinese idioms. After a friend of Zhou's arrived, the Fujianese man asked him questions similar to those he had asked me and jotted down the replies in a notebook. Wearing sports clothing and flashing gold chains on his wrist and neck, the young man had the air of a member of the black society. He had a habit of picking blackheads from his facial skin and examining them before letting them fall to the ground, which annoyed me immensely.

Out of the blue, Zhou told the young man that he and I would open a bar together. As we had no such agreement, I said, "Yes, Zhou will take care of all expenses, and I will manage the bar."

Zhou laughed nervously, but the young guy replied gravely, "But Zhou has no money. That is the problem."

Zhou said that he had encountered problems in his business and that some staff had stolen money from the company. Zhou mentioned Wang and Zhang's names. I was getting fed up and said I was tired and wanted to go home. The young man offered to drive me.

On the way back to my hotel, the young Fujianese man stopped the car, turned to me, and asked: "What do you think about Zhou?"

I tried to state my position subtly but clearly: "I don't know Zhou well enough to say," but the Fujianese man pressed the issue: "Do you think Zhou is a good man or a bad man?"

I again replied, "I don't know Zhou well enough to say," and continued, "But I know Zhang and Wang well, and I think they are good people. Do you understand what I mean?"

This was a way to subtly dissociate myself from Zhou, who had told the Fujianese man that he and I were close friends. The Fujianese man's inquiry about my earnings indicated that I could be held accountable if Zhou failed to return the loan. Zhou had implicated Zhang and Wang with losses in his company, and my saying they were good people undermined the trustworthiness of that statement. The Fujianese man nodded and said, "I understand what you mean."

When I told Wang about that incident back in my room, he revealed that Zhou had attempted to borrow 500,000 RMB from the young man representing a group of loan sharks from Fujian Province. He also said Zhou had asked him to do things that he felt were wrong in his heart. For example, a previous employee allegedly stole money from Zhou's company. Zhou had asked Wang to take this man across the border to Myanmar, tie him up, and steal his passport to make him pay back the money he had allegedly stolen. Wang had declined, and the employee disappeared.

A few days later, Zhou asked Wang to come by his office. Suddenly he hit Wang in the face twice and shouted that Wang did not do his job well. Wang accepted the blows because he feared that Zhou would hurt his wife, who was with him in Ruili if he fought

back. Wang worked for sixteen hours a day, and he was exhausted. At night, he could not sleep because he was thinking about how to escape from Ruili. "Zhou can manipulate me because I am not a local here, but he is afraid to harm Zhang because her family is from Ruili. He is afraid to mess with the locals. I am from a mountain village, and my wife only speaks Hani. What can we do against Zhou? He has *guanxi* 'social connections' here."

I wondered what had happened to the money Zhou had borrowed. Wang mentioned one of Zhou's business schemes that had gone awry. Zhou had learned that a *shuiniu* 'water cattle' sold for 2,000 RMB in Myanmar but could fetch 10,000 RMB in China. So, Zhou bought 1,000 water cows in Myanmar with a partner and arranged to import them without paying import taxes. But the cargo got stopped at a police checkpoint after the border crossing to China. The water buffalos had not been registered or cleared, and Zhou had to return them. Wang did not know how much money Zhou lost but guessed it was substantial.

This incident could be viewed in light of China's broader pattern of bilateral economic relationships. As China's economy and domestic consumer market develop rapidly, raw materials, including agricultural products and biological assets like livestock, are imported from economically less developed neighboring countries like Myanmar. At the same time, processed goods like mobile phones and motorbikes are exported. China's national borderlands provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to profit from price differences between goods on each side of the national border. Some businessmen, like Zhou, try to cut costs on import taxes by attempting to transport undeclared goods across the border. Smuggling of jade, illegal wildlife, and drugs is notorious along the China-Myanmar borderlands. Whether these businessmen succeed depends on factors such as their access to capital, powerful social connections, and knowledge of the local terrain.

FIG 1. Border gate between Ruili, China, and Muse, Myanmar (Ruili, September 2013).



I suggested I ask Zhou to give Wang his salary and let him leave Ruili. After all, Zhou had tried to present himself as a morally

solid man and seemed to care about my perception of him. However, Wang did not want me to confront Zhou as this would reveal that Wang had confided in me. "Then it will end in a bloody mess," warned Wang.

A month later, when Zhou went to Myanmar to investigate new business opportunities, Wang and his wife escaped from Ruili and returned to their mountain village in Yuanyang. A week after their escape, a car with four men stopped in front of Wang's village house. Zhou had sent these black society men who demanded that Wang pay them 300,000 RMB.

Wang's wife invited them inside to drink tea. Meanwhile, Wang went upstairs to fetch two rifles he used for bird hunting. Here, he also phoned some of his friends in the village and asked them to come to his house. When Wang and his friends threatened the black society men, they left the village. After that, Wang did not hear from Zhou or his associates again. While Wang had little power in the lowland, the mountain was his home turf, and Zhou's lowland power did not apply.

LIVELIHOODS, DEVELOPMENT, AND COSMOLOGY IN THE YUANYANG MOUNTAINS

In 2018 at Wang's home in the mountain village of Yuanyang, I opened a bottle of French red wine that I had brought for our reunion, and Wang and I talked.

Wang heard that Zhou had left Ruili and set up a new company that recruits workers for highway construction in Kaiyuan, around five hours from here. Given his track record, we speculate that this latest business venture might also go awry.

Wang is happy in the village but worries about his wife, who is alone in Guangzhou, around 1,300 kilometers east of here. She works as a sewing machinist in a factory that produces bags, earning nine RMB per hour, amounting to 2,500 RMB a month. It is not a lot of money, but it is difficult for her to get a higher salary or find a better job because of her limited Chinese. In addition, both of Wang's parents are ill and cannot work. The family is self-sufficient in food, but Wang's parents need medicine, so Wang and

his wife must bring home money.

Wang recently returned to the village after working for three months picking mangoes in Hainan Province. The job was hard because he labored under the sun all day long. He shows me the sunburn scars on his hand.

There were many snakes at the plantation in Hainan. Sometimes the workers killed a boa constrictor, mixed its blood in alcohol, and added the meat to a soup. Like several other (in some cases endangered) animal species, some snakes are believed to have beneficial medicinal properties in *Zhongyao* 'Traditional Chinese Medicine'. Pythons and venomous snakes are in the hills surrounding Wang's village in Yuanyang. Wang says there were tigers and bears here thirty years ago, but they have disappeared as more extensive forest areas have been cleared. Both tigers and bears are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and poaching puts certain highland animal populations here at risk of extermination.

Some borderland areas near Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar host markets for illegal wildlife trade in Yunnan. Consumer demand has risen in conjunction with China's economic development. Endangered and protected animals are expensive, and certain wealthy businesspeople consume rare animal products and give them as gifts to flaunt their wealth. As cultural factors like local perceptions of health and social prestige may thus negatively impact biodiversity, increasing consumer awareness is an important step toward conversation.

Wang plans to start a business raising organic chickens on an uphill plot. First, he will need to build hen houses and fence the area where the chickens would live, free to roam and eat the vegetation within the enclosure. Wang thinks elderly people and children would benefit from feeling they contribute to the household economy by caring for the chickens while the young people labor in the cities. Wang has estimated that he needs at least 1,000 hens and can sell the organic eggs for one RMB apiece.

Wang needs to pay for the official certification that his animal products are organic. He also considers selling organic smoked pork meat, a local delicacy. Traditional Hani houses here feature an open hearth in the center of the main room. Above the

fire, families hang pork legs which are smoked for a long time. The smoked pork is consumed during festive occasions and when special guests visit. If Wang acquires enough money, he would also like to raise *huangniu* 'yellow cattle', but as demand is high, they cost up to 10,000 RMB per animal now (2018).

Wang would like an attractive logo and packaging for his animal products, and he figures he will need help with marketing from someone from the lowland who knows the market better. He thinks this business could be profitable because there is a rising demand for organic food among lowland urbanites. He says, "What we grow and eat here on the mountain is clean. We don't use chemicals and pesticides."

Wang's father tells me he never drinks bottled water or eats processed foods because he is convinced they would make him ill. He consumes only what they cultivate, raise, collect, hunt, and fish on the mountain. Nevertheless, piles of plastic trash discarded in a nearby stream testify to the rising amount of processed goods consumed on the mountain. Wang's father says there used to be many fish here, but gold mining activities have polluted the nearby stream, where there are now few fish.

FIG 2. Rice fields (Yuanyang, May 2018).



Almost all young villagers who go to urban centers in eastern China do manual work. Wang's friend, Mr. Li, had just returned from working in Guangzhou and Fuzhou for three months. "Manual work is very bitter," he says, "I usually do construction work, but I take whatever I can. We work for long hours and get very tired. I send half of my salary to my family and spend the other half on living expenses. I earned around 10,000 RMB a month. It's a good salary."

Li has around 1,000 tea trees on mountain plots near the village. Some of the trees are more than a century old. The tea has a characteristic earthy, slightly bitter taste. He sells the tea leaves to buyers from Pu'er City, who market it as Pu'er tea, which has become a famous brand name after a sharp rise in demand in the early 2000s from especially Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Taiwan. Some buyers from Beijing and Guangzhou came to the village to buy tea, but Li did not want to sell it to them: "Their hearts are not clean. We are ethnic people, and our hearts are clean, but people from the cities try to cheat us. They offer us very low prices. We sell our tea to intermediaries here in Yunnan, with whom we have *guanxi*. Some tea we keep to drink ourselves. We do not want to sell it. Our tea is good for your health. It is like Chinese medicine."

Li's family is one of the most prosperous families in this village of ninety-two households. They live in a newly constructed three-floor house next to the new asphalt road. Unlike most houses here, his home features hot and cold running water, a refrigerator, and a washing machine. Li has also bought a car and speaks enthusiastically about the new road and the construction of new houses next to it that began seven years ago. The local government urges villagers to build new houses here and provides economic supplements, depending on household income. The supplements do not cover the costs of the building materials. The household can borrow the rest of the money from the bank. Many households have thus become indebted. Wang says this is one reason young people leave the village to work in cities.

During my visit, a house is being built in the village. Most villagers participate in the construction. Women carry mortar in big bags to the construction site, where men pour it onto inlaid iron

bars and then lay down bricks to build walls on top of the foundation. Some elderly men cook a skinned dog and a pig's head in a large wok for a communal meal in the evening.

A dual system of authority and governance is at work in the village. An administrative village leader communicates and implements government policies and participates in distributing government funds. Villagers can apply for government loans for weddings and even travel expenses related to migrant labor. The administrative village leader, a Communist Party member, must be able to read and write Chinese. Consequently, the village has elected a younger man. The village also has an elderly *longtou* 'dragon head'. A ritual specialist, the dragon head recounts events and information dating far back in history, including where the villagers' ancestors came from, their migration route to this site, and their cultural rules and taboos. He also must set an example for other villagers and should not have committed crimes. His tasks include telling and improving the fortune of newborn babies and performing rituals to keep harmful events away from the village and improve the harvest. Also, he uses *fengshui* 'geomancy' to decide the place and time for opening new fields and celebrating weddings. The dragon head will choose a young man as his apprentice and successor. But these days, most young men do not understand the language of the dragon head, and some villages cannot find young men to take over this role.

After asking the dragon head for permission, Mr. Li takes me to the village's ritual site, where only men are permitted. It is in a forest clearing near a stream, considered auspicious, uphill from the village. Li emphasizes that the downhill flow of water is crucial to mountain life. Hani villagers place split bamboo tubes in water streams at different locations in the mountain to make taps of freshwater conveniently available for passers-by to drink.

Trees are also important on the mountain because they prevent soil erosion and flooding during heavy rainfall. The ritual site features a *longshu* 'dragon tree' worshiped during ritual events. The dragon tree at the old ritual site was over one hundred years old, but due to the construction of the new road, villagers relocated the ritual site to this site three years ago and planted a new dragon tree. During Chinese New Year, male villagers *kowtow* ('kneel') to

the dragon tree. At this time, they slaughter a pig whose jaw is tied to the dragon tree. This way, they can see how many years they have lived at this location and worshipped that tree. The ritual site also features a stone carved as a tiger and worshipped in ritual events. Ideally, carving the stone into the shape of a tiger prevents wild boars from entering the site and gnawing the dragon tree. The boar fears the tiger, so the dragon tree is protected.

Mountain inhabitants are ethnically differentiated along a vertical axis. Ethnic Han and Dai live in the valley, ethnic Miao live uphill, and the Hani people live furthest up the mountain. Li says Hani can marry other ethnic groups, but this rarely occurs because their cultures and customs differ. To illustrate, Li points to how the main room of Hani villagers' houses features a sacred space with pictures of ancestors used for ancestor worship. Women are not allowed to enter this space. Before being buried, the dead are placed in this space for one or two days, with leaves placed in the eyes, ears, and mouth to prevent the spirit from leaving the body. Li takes me to a newly built three-floor concrete house. The house does not feature a fireplace inside, and Li says it does not look like a Hani house. But the house does have the space for ancestor worship. "They must keep this space; otherwise, they would not be Hani people," he laughs. Li says the Miao people do not worship ancestors as the Hani people do, so he feels the two groups are incompatible in marriage.

Mountain areas of Yunnan's neighboring countries display a similar pattern of ethnic differentiation along a vertical axis. The language and culture of Hani in Yunnan are similar to that of mountain-dwelling Hani (Akha) in northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. The language and culture of valley-dwelling Dai in Yunnan are similar to that of Shan in Myanmar, Tai in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and so on. Cross-border marriages among ethnic 'cousins' from neighboring countries in these border areas are not uncommon.

Later, Wang takes me to the old village where he grew up. The village was abandoned after villagers built houses closer to the new road. While Li thinks the construction of the new road and houses creates a more modern living environment and new

economic opportunities in the village. Wang feels the housing and environment in the old village were better than their new housing. Wang also points to how this process creates debts that force parents to leave their children in the village while working in lowland cities.

Furthermore, intensified farming, mining, and dam construction may impact biodiversity and ecologies in this area. The relocation of the village ritual site closer to the new road raises questions about how development processes may impact how the Hani people in this village construct the material-cosmological topography of the mountain they reside on. Hani villagers' accentuation of the physical and symbolic importance of water, trees, and animals on the mountain emphasizes that local ecologies that sustain people's livelihoods also guide their cosmologies. We have seen that the tiger still plays a central symbolic role as a worshipped protector at the local site for ritual worship, although it no longer roams in these mountains.

FIG 3. Some of Wang's pigeons (Yuanyang, May 2018).



LOWLAND-HIGHLAND DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES IN YUNNAN

In this essay, I have relayed the narratives Wang shared as I followed him from a lowland border town to a mountain village in Yunnan. Aiming to convey the quotidian complexity of Wang's mobile livelihoods in the context of development processes, I have eschewed theoretical analysis. Experiences of developmental processes are contingent upon the livelihoods and positions of different actors. My long-term engagements with Wang allowed me to designate him as the protagonist of this essay. Taking the perspectives of, for example, Zhou or Li would have created different accounts that might have presented developmental processes in Yunnan more positively, or at least differently. I glean two main lessons from this ethnographic account that regard lowland-highland dynamics and development processes respectively in Yunnan.

First, the relationship between Zhou and Wang, as described in the first part of this essay, highlights how power and economic opportunities are often unequally distributed among lowland and highland populations in Yunnan. A Han Chinese from the lowland, Zhou acquired *guanxi* and capital that allowed him to position himself as a middleman between mining companies and local miners in Yuanyang, between alcohol companies and clients in Ruili, and between construction companies and laborers in Kaiyuan. From northeast China, Zhou speaks *biaozhun* 'standard' Chinese and routinely reeled off a studied repertoire of classical Chinese idioms that signified to some locals in Yunnan that he had cultural capital associated with Chinese high culture.

With the benefits of language, connections, and guile, Zhou acquired millions in RMB loans in Ruili. In contrast, as a mountain farmer with no education beyond secondary school, it was difficult for Wang to establish *guanxi* with powerful people or get a high-paid job in the lowlands.

Wang's wife speaks only the Hani language, which consigns her to low-salary jobs. Wang's family's land in Yuanyang has gold deposits, but the family lacked the connections and capital to

exploit them fully. Wang's family had done artisanal mining for years, but the local government had recently closed villagers' mining pits while leasing concessions to companies with industrial machinery. The development of new roads and houses now brings specters of modernization and economic mobility further up the mountains in Yunnan. However, these developments encourage villagers to go into debt, which is one reason many leave their children in the village while they undertake migrant labor in lowland cities.

Some highlanders I met in Yunnan told me that people from the lowlands take advantage of their 'clean hearts', as Li put it. On the mountain, we went to a downhill waterfall for a picnic. Wang walked into a hut and asked the family for salt and a machete to cut bamboo. The ethnic Miao family gave him the articles and a piece of smoked pork. Wang did not know the family, but he said it is customary on the mountain to provide visitors with what they need, regardless of ethnicity. This 'highland sharing mentality' operates on a different exchange logic than the market relations that significantly impact lowland urban sociality. Zhou lived as a guest in Wang's house in Yuanyang for six months during his gold mining venture. Wang might have expected to be similarly treated as Zhou's guest in Ruili. Instead, Zhou hired Wang and his wife as low-paid employees, withheld their salaries, and threatened Wang to keep him compliant in an environment where neither legal nor social sanctions were available to Wang.

Zhou was skilled at drawing people into his *guanxi* network and using them instrumentally, as his attempt to use me as 'face' to acquire a loan in Ruili's black moneylending market illustrates. Zhou's businesses exemplify a 'wild capitalism' that flourishes when laws are not strictly enforced. This is perhaps now most visible in China's national borderlands. Previously considered backward peripheries, many of these borderland areas are becoming spearheads for China's global ambitions, manifested in cross-border infrastructure, trade hubs, and Special Economic Zones as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. For entrepreneurs, these development processes offer new economic opportunities stratified according to factors such as access to investment capital and

powerful social connections.

Secondly, this essay has described how development processes may impact livelihoods, ecology, and cosmology in a highland Hani village in Yunnan. The construction of dams creates hydropower that fuels industrialization and development in Yunnan. New infrastructures like roads, railways, and Special Economic Zones connect wider areas and more people and facilitate trade. A new road to Wang's village will make transporting his highland produce to the lowland faster. Traditional highland ways of farming and animal husbandry without chemicals and pesticides are becoming an asset, as food scandals and health anxieties create rising consumer demand for 'clean' food in lowland urban areas. Packaging his animal produce as 'organic' thus provides new economic opportunities for Wang. In urban lowland Chinese imaginaries, the mountain, in some respects, represents a natural, traditional, and authentic space, not only for social forms and communities not wholly guided by market relations but also for 'clean' ecology and food production.

Meanwhile, the same development processes and technologies may impact this 'clean' mountain ecology and the livelihoods and cosmologies that are intimately tied to it. Dam building and gold mining reduce fish stocks in the rivers, and the rising consumption of processed goods on the mountain creates inorganic litter that pollutes the rivers. Also, some animals like tigers, bears, and snakes that have roamed these highland ecological 'refuges' have become endangered due both to intensifying farming and to poaching that caters to a consumer demand that is driven both by perceptions of their medicinal properties and their value as rare and expensive consumer goods.

Traditional Hani cosmology has been influenced by the ecologies of the mountains they have resided on. The Hani people recognize the importance of water streams, trees, and animals to their livelihoods, manifested in the material-symbolic position and composition of their traditional site for ritual worship. As prospects of economic mobility and more 'modern' lives gain a foothold among Hani youth especially, their traditional cosmology tied as it is to the ecology of the mountain will likely be reshaped to

accommodate their changing livelihoods and physical mountain environments. Material objects such as the carved stone tigers and dragon trees at their ritual sites might become archaic remnants that serve as mnemonics for Hani villagers' imagining of a past world that is transforming.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

biaozhun 标准, Standard Chinese

Dai 傣, ethnic Dai people

Dehong 德宏, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

Duoyishu 多依树, Duoyishu Rice Terraces. UNESCO Heritage Site in Yuanyang County, Yunnan Province.

fengshui 风水, geomancy

guanxi 关系, social connections

Han 汉, ethnic Han people

Hani 哈尼, ethnic Hani people

hei shehui 黑社会, black society, mafia

Honghe 红河, Red River; Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province

huangniu 黄牛, yellow cattle, category of Chinese cattle

Kaiyuan 开远 City, Yunnan Province

kaixin 开心, happiness, an expression used in toasts

ke tou 磕头, to kneel and touch the forehead to the ground as a token of homage, worship, or respect

Li 李, an ethnic Hani farmer in Yuanyang who did manual labor in eastern China.

li 礼, etiquette

longtou 龙头, dragon head, Hani ritual specialist

longshu 龙数, dragon tree, planted at ritual sites in Hani villages

Miao 苗, ethnic Miao people

Nansha 南沙, the administrative seat of Yuanyang County in the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

Pu'er 普洱 City in Yunnan Province

renyi 仁义, benevolence

Qinghai 青海 Province, PR China

RMB 人民币, renminbi, national Chinese currency

Ruili 瑞丽 City, Yunnan Province

shaoshu minzu 少数民族. Ethnic minority

shuiniu 水牛, water cattle, category of cattle

Wang 王, an ethnic Hani man who farmed in Yuanyang and worked
as a driver in Ruili

xin 信, genuineness

Yuanyang 元阳 County, Yunnan Province

Yunnan 云南 Province, PR China

zhi 智, wisdom

zhongyao 中药, Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Zhou 周, a Han Chinese man who did business in Yuanyang, Ruili,
and Kaiyuan

PHOTO ESSAYS

PHOTO ESSAY: RELIGIOUS LIFE IN BON SKOR, AN A MDO TIBETAN COMMUNITY, PR CHINA

Rdo rje dpal 'byor ལྷོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་ཡོན་པོ་ (Duojihuanjiao 多吉环角)*

ABSTRACT

This photo essay documents religious activities and sites in Bon skor (Wangshenke) Community, Bya mdo (Shagou) Township, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Key aspects of community religious life include creating Buddhist clay images for stupas, turning prayer wheels, and offering butter lamps and water at a local *ma Ni* Hall where annual community religious rituals are held. Changes in local religious rituals are rapid, highlighting the value of this essay and its twenty-three images in recording local religious life in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS

Amdo religious life, Amdo deity images, Tibetan prayer wheel, ma Ni Hall, Tibetan butter lamps

INTRODUCTION

Bon skor (Wangshenke) is an agro-pastoral Tibetan community in Bya mdo (Shagou) Township, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China, located 200 kilometers (three hours by bus) from Zi ling (Xining) City, the Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) capital. Bon skor's five *ru khag* 'brigades' include four in the farming area and one in Dgon thang (twenty-six kilometers from the farming area) along the Rma chu 'Yellow River'. In 2007, the rise of the dammed Rma chu (Tshal rgna Reservoir 'Longyangxia') led Brigade Five to resettle near Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township Town, Mang ra County. In 2022, Bon skor had 2,200 residents and 570 households.

* Rdo rje dpal 'byor. 2023. Photo Essay: Religious Life in Bon Skor, an A mdo Tibetan Community, PR China. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:288-314.

Locals tend sheep, goats, and cattle and cultivate wheat, barley, and canola. A few practice Bon, but most are Dge lugs Buddhist devotees. Residents hold multiple religious rituals collectively and privately every year for spiritual satisfaction, protection from illness and natural catastrophes, and strengthening of a sense of community.

FIG 1. Lha sgron rgyal (b. 1970) and her sister, Lha mo mtsho (b. 1972), at their sister's (G.yang ris, b. 1977) home to help make Buddhist images. *Bzang drug*¹ is added to *sa dmar* 'red soil' collected from Gong kha² to make a clay mixture for Buddhist images. Cleanliness is of paramount concern when involved in this activity. Participants wash their hands and wear disposable gloves and masks to avoid contaminating the clay. Chunks of clay are put in plastic bags until the next day to make kneading the clay easier (26 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).³



¹ A medicinal, purifying powder made from six precious substances used in religious activities.

² A rich source of red soil in Mang ra County. Local *bla ma* consecrated that area and asked residents to use it to make images.

³ Rdo rje dpal 'byor, G.yang byam skyid, and G.yang ris took the photos in this essay in 2017 and 2022.

FIG 2. The following day, the three siblings (mentioned above) and their sister-in-law, Mi do (1986), pounded the clay with rubber mallets until it was smooth, thin, and flat. *Gzungs gzhus*¹ was placed under the clay, and *sku dpar*² was carefully positioned atop the flat clay pieces. One hand gripped the mold handle while the other struck the handle top with a mallet to imprint the images. Afterward, a sharpened piece of wood was used to remove extra clay around the clay images. A mold required frequent brushing and rubbing with canola oil to limit the clay sticking to the mold to ensure clear, intact images. Lha sgron rgyal (top right) holds a *sku dpar* (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).



¹ It generally refers to a few barley grains at the back of every image. High-ranking *bla ma* or monks give specific instructions. Papers with mantras were also used.

² A copper mold was used to make clay images.

FIG 3. Four women use a Tshe lha rnam gsum¹ mold to create images. Four images were simultaneously made on clay with less time and effort, and less soil was needed. The image features three divinities of longevity, Tshe dpag med at the top with two stupas on each side, Sgrol dkar on the left, and Gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma to the right (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).



¹ Three divinities of longevity: Tshe dpag med (Amitayus), Sgrol dkar (White Tara), and Gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma (Namgyalma)
<https://bit.ly/3M4qRHI> 3 October 2022.

FIG 4. This *sku dpar* is owned by Rnam 'bu's (b. 1972) family, who purchased it for 500RMB in a shop in Khri ka (Guide) that sold Buddhist-related items in 2014. Rnam 'bu made the *thod dkar* 'elm' frame. The metal end of the wooden handle reduced wear. A steel wire prevented cracking (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).



FIG 5. One thousand three hundred images of Tshe lha rnam gsum were dried for about twenty days before being placed in a stupa under construction at Ba kyA Monastery.¹ Many other local families each voluntarily made over 1,000 images to accumulate merit, stay safe, have long lives, and repel illness and bad fortune. Monks from Ba kyA are often invited to chant in local homes. Residents also sponsored the construction of a Ba kyA Assembly Hall and prayer wheels (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).



¹ Ba kyA dgon dar rgyas gling is located in Ba kyA Village, sixteen kilometers from Khri ka County Town. According to Nian and Bai (1993:189), it is a branch of La mo bde chen Monastery of Gcan tsha (Jianzha), a county in Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. However, the local monks I consulted on 4 October 2022 told me the monastery was founded in 1827 by the second 'Ja' mo dkon mchog bstan 'dzin nyi ma (1791-1854). A lags snying nge was assigned to be the *bla ma* of this monastery in 1827. There were twenty monks in 2022. See Smith (2017:70) for a photo of the monastery.

FIG 6. This image of Mi 'khrugs pa (Rgyal ba mi 'khrugs pa), a supreme Buddhist being, is surrounded by a mantra locals chant to eliminate sins. Rnam 'bu's family made 1,000 images to put inside a stupa at the local nunnery¹ in the spring of 2022. Locals believe making this image helps eliminate misdeeds such as killing animals and harming other living creatures. Buddhist images such as Sgrol ma 'Tara', Ao rgyan rin po che (Padmasambhava 'Born from a Lotus'), and Tshe lha rnam gsum are also made based on what is required (2022, G.yang byams skyid).

¹ Bon skor jo mo dgon pa 'Bon skor Nunnery' had thirty nuns in 2022. It is located seven kilometers from the farming section of Bon skor. According to a local nun, it was founded in 2014. It is subsidiary to Tho le Monastery (Tho le dgon rnam rgyal phun tshogs chos rdzong gling), which was originally located in the Tho le area near the Rma chu in the northwest of Mang ra County, thirty-nine kilometers from the County Town. Founded by Dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas in 1916, it was a branch monastery of La mo bde chen Monastery. In 1984 after construction of Tshal rnga 'Longyangxia' Reservoir, the monastery was relocated to the northwest of the contemporary Mang ra Township. The monastery had thirty-four monks and one incarnation *bla ma* (Nian and Bai 1993:201).



FIG 7. These *gzungs gzhug* are for the Mi 'khrugs pa images. Mi 'khrugs pa mantras were wrapped with pine needles and *dar tshon sna lnga* 'threads of five colors' (yellow, red, green, white, blue) symbolizing *byung ba lnga* 'the five elements' (earth, water, fire, air, space). A small hole was made at the back of the image in the heart area where the *gzungs gzhug* were placed inside. The opening was covered with clay (2022, G.yang byams skyid).



FIG 8. Lha sgron rgyal and G.yang ris used a mold with one hundred images of Klu dbang ryal bo 'Naga King'¹/'Nagaraja'² to make the 100,000 images required to build a '*bum khang*'.³ They ate no meat, garlic, or onion while engaged in this effort. Eating meat when associated with rituals involving water deities was forbidden for fear of offending these deities, as does the strong smell of garlic and onion. The women who made these clay images had health issues. One had rheumatoid arthritis, and the other often suffered from joint pain. *Mo ba* 'diviners' and local *bla ma* they consulted said they had offended *klu* 'naga'. Consequently, their families often asked monks or *sngags pa* 'tantric practitioners' to chant scriptures and hold rituals related to water deities that might help them improve. Both had collected firewood in a valley and played at water sources as children, which they believed had offended the *klu*.

The images they made were used to construct a '*bum khang*' near the community where a monk had designated a spring and selected a day for the ritual. Since it was a *klu*-related ritual, it was done on a *klu thebs* day – a day *klu* emerged from their retreats.

On the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month of 2022, relatives carried clay images to the designated area with a water source at the upper side of the spring. A huge new fabric piece was spread on the ground, clay images were stacked on it, and the monk chanted. When it rained, the images disintegrated and flowed into the water source (2022, G.yang ris).

¹ Nagas were considered serpent spirits classified as one of the eight classes of gods and demons, or as animals or demi-gods who live beneath the earth's surface or in water, and in trees or rocks. Endowed with magical powers and wealth, they are responsible for certain illnesses transmitted to humans <https://bit.ly/3Dtr43B> 1 November 2022.

² Nagaraja's relationship with the nagas and spirits of the waterways, oceans, lakes, and the underworld explain why he was especially worshipped when diseases believed to be caused by nagas arose <https://bit.ly/3gEW7BO> 22 October 2022.

³ A religious practice requiring at least 100,000 clay images of one Buddha that are buried, or sometimes put in a stupa-like structure, with the help of a monk or several monks. A *bla ma* might also be engaged to chant during the ritual.

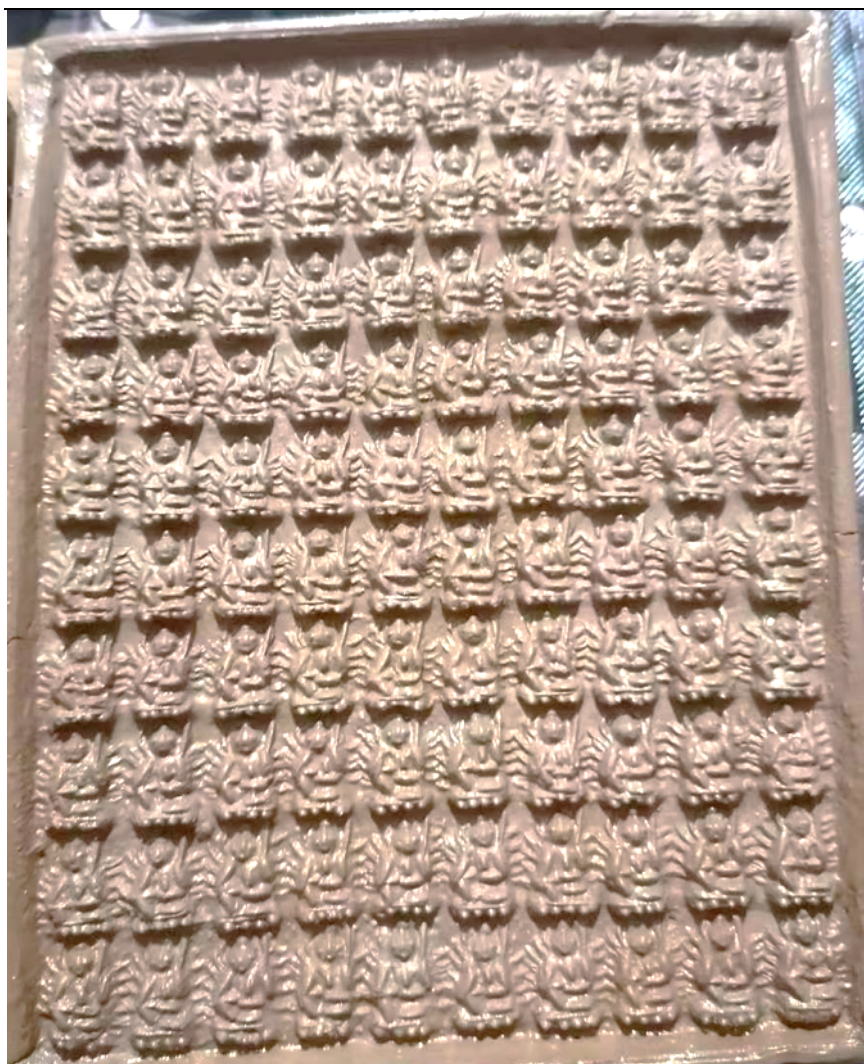


FIG 9. This Klu dbang rgyal bo mold featured a stupa on either side with mantras around the image. Lha sgron rgya bought it in 2021 at the suggestion of a monk (responsible for making 'bum khang near a water source). He said it was better to make images with a mold that had a single clear image since the mold with a hundred images was not very clear, so Lha sgron rgya bought it. This mold was also used to make *chu dpar* 'water images' when the mold was repeatedly put into the water and removed. This was often practiced by locals near a spring or in a river. Lha sgron rgya and her sister made 300 images using this mold for a 'bum khang (27 July 2022, Rdo rje dpal 'byor).



RELIGIOUS SITE

FIG 10. The local *ma Ni* Hall is in the community's farming area. In 2016, the courtyard and gate were rebuilt with local contributions and community and religious leader management. A concrete road and steps were built, streetlamps were installed, and poplar and pine trees were planted around the yard. A stone lion was on either side of the steps (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 11. Prayer flags are on the back mountain as morning fog swirls around the *ma Ni* Hall. Rooms (L-R): a communal kitchen often used to cook for those who turned prayer wheels and participated in collective religious rituals such as fasting, chanting scriptures, and rituals to accumulate *tshogs* 'merit'.¹ The middle room allowed locals to sit and turn the prayer wheels and had seats and tables for meals. The green tile-roofed room had four large prayer wheels. Buddhist images and scriptures were on the shelves. Other rooms included a '*du khang* 'Assembly Hall', and five additional kitchens (one for each of the community's five brigades; six kitchens in total). There was also a room made from sheet metal for offering *mchod*

¹ A ritual held on the tenth and twenty-fifth days of each lunar month. Participants accumulated merit by chanting during this ritual.

me 'butter lamps' (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 12. The *ma Ni* Hall had four prayer wheels. One contained 100 million *ma Ni* script¹ built after the Culture Revolution when locals were at the community's former location (Bon po zhing kha).² The prayer wheel was brought to the current resettled location, and a small *ma Ni* room was built where the only prayer wheel was occasionally turned. Three prayer wheels made in Chab cha (Qiabuqia)³ with community patronage began to be rotated in the farming area on 15 October 2007. The prayer wheels have the *gzung gzhug* of the *Thar mdo* 'Liberation Scripture' and *Rdo rje gcod ba*,⁴ as well as around thirty different mantras. Each household spins the prayer wheels for twenty-four hours without pause about once every nineteen months since there were 570 households. In the event of a community member's death, the deceased's family could turn the prayer wheels (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).

¹ The six syllables of the Avalokitesvara mantra are *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*.

² Twenty kilometers from the current location and now submerged in Tshal rnga Reservoir.

³ The capital of Mtsho lho Prefecture.

⁴ The *Vajra Cutter Sutra* or *Diamond Sutra* <https://bit.ly/3fxeWGB> 1 November 2022.



FIG 13. Images of Ao rgyan rin po che (L), Thugs rje chen po (R), and other images were on the shelves, along with the multi-volume *Bka' 'gyur*¹ and *Bstan 'gyur*.² *Thang kha* and images of high-ranking *bla ma* were also displayed. Religious personages featured in photos were the ninth reincarnation of La mo gser khri chos kyi blo gros (b. 1969) (l) and the ninth reincarnation of La mo zhabs drung dkar po blo bzang bstan' dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan (b. 1992) (r). Lamps and flickering artificial flowers were provided as offerings. Annually on the eighth day of the sixth lunar month, community members tied these scripture volumes to their backs with sashes. They circumambulated once around the community's farmland and houses, requiring about six hours (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).

¹ Tibetan translations of the Buddha's own teachings

<https://bit.ly/3sQQox6> 2 November 2022.

² Commentaries on the Buddha's teachings <https://bit.ly/3ST18nv> November 2022.



FIG 14. Two local elders spun prayer wheels surrounding the *ma Ni* Hall. Religious leaders installed the prayer wheels with community members' financial support in 2016. Elders were the most frequent visitors to circumambulate, chant, and prostrate. They especially visited on the first, eighth, tenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-first, twenty-fifth, and thirtieth days of each lunar month. They prayed for good health, longevity, harmony between people, and removing misfortune. Locals lacquered the wheels when they lost paint, which was considered a great religious contribution (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 15. When their turn came to spin the prayer wheels, Bsod nams tshe bstan's family prepared butter for lamps, food, and water. At seven AM on 4 August 2022, Bsod nams tshe bstan and his wife, Khro mo, packed items in their car and traveled to the ma Ni Hall, where they took over from another family. Around nine AM, residents came to turn the prayer wheels, pulling on leather straps attached to the prayer wheels in another room. Locals often helped each other spin prayer wheels and, in return, had helpers when it was their turn. Helpers were needed, especially at night. They usually made groups of two or three and divided the hours for each group to turn the prayer wheels at night. Fruits, beverages, and snacks were often offered to the helpers. Locals gossiped if the prayer wheels stopped rotating (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 16. Lha sgrong rgya made *gro 'bras* 'wild yam rice' - wild yams, raisins, melted butter, and white granulated sugar with rice. The family responsible for prayer wheels on a certain day often offered lunch to those who helped turn the prayer wheels. *Rtsam pa*, cheese, butter, *gro 'bras*, and yogurt were typically provided. Eating meat in the *ma Ni* Hall was taboo (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 17. Khro mo fills disposable bowls with *hub ser*¹ 'cold wheat-flour noodles' drained and mixed with salt, oil, fried chopped *ke'u* 'chives', *sgog chu* 'minced garlic with liquid', vinegar, and chili powder, according to individual taste. Lha sgron rgyal and Lha mo mtsho also prepared tea and bread for lunch (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



¹ *Hub ser* is CT (Colloquial Tibetan) for a type of cold noodle.

FIG 18. Lunch. 'O ja 'milk tea', ja nag 'black tea', cung rdog¹ 'steamed buns', go re dmar po 'fried bread', fruit (watermelon, peaches) were on trays. Everyone was offered rtsam ba, gro 'bras, yogurt, and cold noodles based on their preference (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 19. A *bsang khri*² in the ma Ni Hall courtyard. The manager burned incense every morning to worship deities. Locals burned incense during religious rituals. They first made a fire with cow dung. When it stopped smoking, *bsang rtsi* 'incense material'³ was added. Tea or liquor was sprinkled on the incense and to the sky to beseech the deities for blessings and protection (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).

¹ CT.

² A brick platform for burning *bsang* 'incense'.

³ LT (Literary Tibetan): *bsang rdzas* consisting of juniper leaves, and barley flour (main ingredients), granulated sugar, and fruit.



FIG 20. The *mchod pa* 'water-offerings' platform. The Buddhist images and decorations on the wall were made in 2022. The water offering ritual was initiated in 2017 after 2,500 *kong bu* 'butter lamp vessels', and 1,500 *dong bur*¹ 'water-offering bowls' were purchased with local contributions. Bzhi b'i smyung gnas 'Fasting Rite of the Fourth Month',² was held from the twenty-ninth day of the third lunar month to the fifteenth of the fourth lunar month. Mostly women residents fasting for sixteen days³ at the *ma Ni* Hall. Households were divided into *gshog ka* 'groups' of twenty to forty households based on family, *tsho ba* 'clan', or random assignment. Each group made water offerings, offering butter lamps, and serving those fasting for two days (4 August

¹ LT: *mchod kong*.

² See Pad+ma rig 'dzin (2021:47-73) for a description of an A mdo Smyung gnas.

³ A fasting ritual typically held for two days. On the first day, participants were free to have lunch and a cup of milk tea in the evening. On the second day, participants only chanted and were forbidden to have food and drink, and talk with others. This continued until the next morning. At dawn, they had *thor thug* 'sweet milk-flour soup'. This sixteen-day ritual consisted of eight fasting periods locals referred to as *smyung gnas chog brgyad* 'eight fasting rituals'. Participants practiced based on their ability and time. They were not required to fast a certain number of times. Some fasted for sixteen days, while others fasted intermittently.

2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 21. A group of people offered water with kettles in the *ma Ni* Hall. The water-offering receptacles were put in order in straight lines. The space between bowls ideally was the size of a barley grain. Water was carefully poured into the bowls without spilling.¹ Once all the bowls were filled, five to ten minutes passed. The bowls were then emptied and rubbed with a cloth. This process was repeated to offer as much water as possible. Klu mo rgyal (b. 1965) said, "Around 10,000 bowls of water can be offered a day if many people are involved."

As the local saying goes:

TEXT AS SPOKEN

ཡར་དཀོན་མཆོག་གི་མཆོད་པ།

མར་དབུས་བོར་བྱིན་པ།

yar dkon mchog ga mchod pa,

¹ According to community resident, Lha sgron (b. 1946), an appropriate amount of water was to be poured into the offering bowls. If the bowl overflowed, the person responsible was in danger of losing control of their saliva or mucus flow in the next life. If the water was too little, a very poor next life was a possibility.

mar dbul bor sbyin pa.

LITERARY POETIC TEXT

ཡར་དགོན་མཆོག་ལ་མཆོད་པ།

མར་དབུས་བོ་ལ་བྱིན་པ།

yar dkon mchog la mchod pa,

mar dbul bo la sbyin pa.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Provide offerings to the Jewels,¹

Offer donations to impoverished people.

Water offerings help prevent famine and bring wealth in the next life (2017, Rdo rje dpal byor).



¹ The Three Jewels (the Buddha, dharma, and sangha).

FIG 22. A local elder melted *mchod mar* 'butter for offering' (margarine bought from the township town used to make *mchod me*). Locals often offered butter lamps at the *ma Ni* Hall during rituals (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



FIG 23. Women made *mchod me* in a room built for lit butter lamps. They first made *sdong ras* 'wicks' (thin *sdong rtswa* 'grass stalks' wrapped with cotton). The length and thickness depended on the size of the butter lamp vessel. The end of the wick in the small hole at the vessel's center was thicker than the upper part. Melted butter was poured into the butter lamp vessel and on the wick so it would readily light. Butter lamp vessel names were based on their size. For example, a *mtshan thub* was a butter lamp that burned all night, and a *tshe 'bar* was a large one that burned for around ten days and nights (4 August 2022, Rdo rje dpal byor).



TIBETAN TERMS

'bum khang འབྲུམ་ཁང་།

'du khang འདུ་ཁང་།

'o ja འོ་ཇ།

'ja' mo dkon mchog bstan

'dzin nyi ma

འཇའ་མོ་དཀོན་མཆོག་བསྐྱེད་འཛིན་ཉི་མ།

a lags snying nge

ཨ་ལགས་སྙིང་དེ།

Avalokitesvara, spyan ras

gzigs སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས།

Padmasambhava, ao rgyan

rin po che ཨ་ཁྱེན་པེན་པོ་ཆེ།

'byung ba lnga འབྱུང་བ་ལྔ།

ba kyA dgon dar rgyas gling

བ་ལྷ་དཀོན་དར་རྒྱལ་གླིང་།

bka' 'gyur བཀའ་འགྱུར།

bla ma བླ་མ།

bon po zhing kha བོན་པོ་ཟིང་ཀ་།

bon skor བོན་སྐོར།

bon skor jo mo dgon pa

བོན་སྐོར་ཇོ་མོ་དཀོན་པ།

bsang བསང་།

bsang khri བསང་ཁྲི།

bsang rdzas བསང་རྩས།

bsang rtsi བསང་རྩི།

bsod nams tshe bstan

བསོད་ནམས་ཆེ་བསྐྱེད།

bstan 'gyur བསྐྱེད་འགྱུར།

bya mdo བྱ་མདོ།

bzang drug བཟང་དུག

bzhi b'i smyung gnas

བཞི་བའི་སྦྱང་གནས།

chab cha ཆབ་ཇ།

chu dpar ལྷ་དཔར།

cung rdog ལུང་རྟོག (CT)

dar tshon sna lnga དར་ཚོན་སྣ་ལྔ།

dgon thang དཀོན་ཐང་།

dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas

དགེ་འདུན་བཟན་པ་དར་རྒྱས།

dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།

dong bur རྡོང་བུར།

g.yang byams skyid

གཡང་བྱམས་སྦྱིད།

g.yang ris གཡང་རིས།

gcan tsha གཅན་ཅ།

gcod ba གཅོད་པ།

go re dmar po གོ་རེ་དམར་པོ།

gong kha གོང་ཁ།

gro 'bras གྲོ་འབྲས།

gshog ka གཤོག་ཀ།

gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma

གཏུག་རྟོར་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མ།

gzungs gzhug གཟུངས་གཟུག

hub ser (CT) ལུབ་ཤེར།

ja nag ཇ་ནག

jo mo dgon pa ཇོ་མོ་དགོན་པ།

ke'u ཀེ་འུ།

khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

khro mo ཁྲོ་མོ།

klu ལུ།

klu dbang rgyal bo

ལུ་དབང་རྒྱལ་བོ།

klu mo rgyal ལུ་མོ་རྒྱལ།

klu thebs ལུ་ཐེབས།

kong bu ཀོང་བུ།

la mo bde chen ལ་མོ་བདེ་ཆེན།

la mo gser khri chos kyi blo

gros ལ་མོ་གཤེར་ཁྲི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ལྷོ་ཤྲོས།

la mo zhabs drung dkar po blo

bzang bstan 'dzin chos kyi

rgyal mtshan

ལ་མོ་ཞབས་བྱུང་དཀར་པོ་བླ་བཟང་བཟན་འཛིན་ཆོས་

ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

lha mo mtsho ལྷ་མོ་མཚོ།

lha sgron ལྷ་སྒོན།

lha sgron rgyal ལྷ་སྒོན་རྒྱལ།

ma Ni མ་ཤེ།

mang ra མང་ར།

mchod kong མཚོད་ཀོང།

mchod mar མཚོད་མར།

mchod me མཚོད་མེ།

mchod pa མཚོད་པ།

mgo mang མགོ་མང།

mi 'khrugs pa མི་འཁྲུགས་པ།

mi do མི་དོ།

mo ba མོ་བ།

mtshan thub མཚན་ཐུབ།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

Naga, klu ལྷ།

Nagaraja, klu dbang ryal bo

ལྷ་དབང་རྒྱལ་བོ།

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM

ཨོ་མ་ཤེ་དཔྱེ་ཕྱི།

rdo rje dpal byor

རྡོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་འབྱོར།

rdo rje gcod ba རྡོ་རྗེ་གཅོད་པ།

rgyal ba mi 'khrugs pa

རྒྱལ་བ་མི་འཁྲུགས་པ།

rma chu མ་ཅུ།

rma lho མ་ལྷོ།

rnam 'bu རྣམ་འབྲ།

rtsam ba རྩས་པ།

ru khag རུ་ཁག

sa dmar ས་དམར།

sdong ras རྫོང་རས།

sdong rtswa རྫོང་རྩ།

sgog chu སྒོག་ཅུ།

sgrol dkar སྒྲོལ་དཀར།

sku dpar སུ་དཔར།

slob dpon rin po che

སྟེང་དོན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
 smyung gnas chog brgyad
 སྟེང་གནས་ཚོག་བརྒྱད།
 sngags pa རྟགས་པ།
 Tara, sgrol ma སྟོལ་མ།
 thar mdo ཐར་མདོ།
 tho le ཐོ་ལེ།
 tho le dgon rnam rgyal phun
 tshogs chos rdzong gling
 ཐོ་ལེ་དགོན་རྩམ་རྒྱལ་ལུན་ཚོགས་ཚས་རྫོང་གྲོང་།
 thod dkar ཐོད་དཀར།
 thor thug ཐོར་ཐུག
 thugs rje chen po
 ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཆེན་པོ།
 tshal rnga ཐཤ་རང།
 tshe 'bar ཐཤེ་འབར།
 tshe dpag med ཐཤེ་དཔག་མེད།
 tshe lha rnam gsum
 ཐཤེ་ལྷ་རྩམ་གསུམ།

tsho ba ཐོ་བ།
 tshogs ཐོགས།
 Vajra Cutter, rdo rje gcod ba
 འོ་རྩེ་གཙོང་པ།

CHINESE TERMS

Guide 贵德
 Guinan 贵南
 Guomaying 过马营
 Hainan 海南
 Huangnan 黄南
 Jainzha 尖扎
 Longyangxia 龙羊峡
 Qiabuqia 恰卜恰
 Qinghai 青海
 Shagou 沙沟
 Wangshenke 汪什科
 Xining 西宁

PHOTO ESSAY: TIBETAN WOMEN MAKE BUTTER AND CHEESE IN SUMMER

Sgrol ma lha mo སྒྲོལ་མ་ལ་མོ་ (Zhuo ma la mao 卓玛拉毛)*

ABSTRACT

This photo essay is based on a documentary film¹ of a woman's daily life in a herding area in G.yang shar (Yaxiu) Village, G.yu dkar 'om lung (Yikewulan) Township, Rkang tsha (Gangcha) County, Mtsho byang (Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. The photos feature milking yaks and making and selling butter and cheese.

KEYWORDS

pastoral Tibetan women, Tibetan women dairy, G.yang shar

INTRODUCTION.

This photo essay focuses on milking yaks and making butter and cheese in G.yang shar (Yaxiu) Village, G.yu dkar 'om lung (Yikewulan) Township, Rkang tsha (Gangcha) County, Mtsho Byang (Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Rkang tsha is located three hours by bus northeast of Zi ling (Xining) City, the capital of Mtsho sngon Province. In Rkang tsha County, the population of 29,000 is seventy percent Tibetan. There are also Han, Mongolian, Hui, Dongxiang, and other ethnic residents.²

Mtsho sngon po is the largest saline lake in China and is sacred to many Tibetans. It is a popular tourist destination, boosting the tourism industry in surrounding areas, including Rkang tsha County, which must be passed through when circumambulating Mtsho sngon po.

G.yang shar Village is a herding area where people raise yaks, sheep, and horses. Most locals have three separate pastures – winter, summer, and spring-autumn. Many young people attend

* Sgrol ma lha mo. 2023. Photo Essay: Tibetan Women Make Cheese and Butter in Summer. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:315-332.

¹ <https://archive.org/details/dolmas-film> 27 April 2023.

² <https://bit.ly/3KTlopQ> 27 April 2023.

government schools, which has led many locals to move to the county or township towns. While most sell their livestock to earn income, men also work on construction sites, and women work in Chinese and Muslim restaurants.

Local life is changing rapidly. Young people are increasingly distant from pastoral life. Tshe mdo's daily life is an example of local women's life in G.yang Shar (Yaxiu) Village, G.yu dkar 'om lung (Yikewulan) Township, Rkang tsha (Gangcha) County, Mtsho byang (Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province in 2023.

FIG 1. Fences divide autumn pastures between families. Locals use *rna skud*¹ 'ear tags' to distinguish their yaks. My family uses red wool ear tags to ensure our yaks can be easily identified and separated when they mix with other families' yaks. Every yak and calf has *ske thug*² with *cha ru*³ that can tie them to '*dogs thag*,⁴ which tie on *rdang*.⁵ The two *rdang* ends are tied with *phur ba*.⁶ Female yaks and calves are tied separately to ensure the calves don't nurse their mothers.

Rdo b+he (b. 2015) is a primary school student. He untied every calf for his mother, Tshe mdo. After a calf had nursed for a short time, he pulled it away and tied it to the tether rope so his mother could milk the milk yak. This is a daily morning task that Rdo b+he does during the summer holiday. Many children from herding areas live in cities and experience different lives.

¹ *Rna skud* are ear tags locals make with colorful wool to distinguish yaks. Family yaks have ear tags of various color and sizes.

² A *ske thug* is a soft rope made from sheep wool and yak hair tied around a yak's neck.

³ A *cha ru* is a small, short stick connected to a *ske thug*. A knot is easily tied to the '*dogs thag*.

⁴ A '*dogs thag* is a short rope that ties yaks to a *rdang*.

⁵ A *rdang* is a rope. Its length depends on the number of yaks. Many '*dogs thag* are tied to *rdang*. Adult yaks and calves are tied with *rdang* separately. *Rdang* for calves are *be'u rdang*. *Rdang* for adult yaks are *nor rdang*.

⁶ A *phur ba* is a wooden stick in the earth. They support the *rdang*.



FIG 2. Tshe mdo (right) began milking when she was fourteen and never attended school. Local neighbor women have a strong sense of helping each other. Especially in summer, they help each other milk the yaks, Tshe mdo milks about forty yaks, which takes about four hours when she milks by herself. She usually gets up at five AM if nobody helps her. If there is a helper, only two hours are required. Some strong female yaks give birth at the beginning of Spring. Most give birth in late Spring or early summer.



FIG 3. A neighbor, Dar skyid, hobbles a yak's forelegs to ensure the

yak is easier and safer to milk. Some yaks require both the hindlegs and forelegs to be hobbled, while others only need either their forelegs or hindlegs hobbled. Hobbling prevents yaks from kicking, which may spill the milk in a bucket. This is especially true for milking *thul ma* 'female yak that experienced a first birth'. Locals say the quantity of a *thul ma*'s milk depends on who milked it the first time. Ideally, the milker should be an experienced woman with good milking skills. Such a woman can teach *thul ma* good habits. For example, the *thul ma* will not require hobbling later. We also tie sheep wool to a *thul ma*'s tail, hoping the *thul ma* will have more milk.



FIG 4. Tshe mdo unties the yak's hobble after milking it.



FIG 5. The yak nurses twin calves. Usually, we don't milk mother yaks with twin calves because the milk produced by the mother yak is not enough to feed both calves if we milk it every day. Locals believe it is a good sign for a family's prosperity when their livestock gives birth to twin calves.



FIG 6. After milking, we untied all the yaks with their calves. Before we milked yaks in the morning and at night during the summer, we separated calves from their mothers. Local kids herded calves all day to keep them away from their mothers. This changed around 2020, with locals milking yaks once a day. That also made it easier for most children who don't need to herd calves during the day.



FIG 7. Tshe mdo helps Rdo b+he tether a calf after it nurses its

mother. Some calves are stronger than Rdo+be, making it difficult for him to tie them by himself. Calves might choke while nursing if their neck ropes are pulled too strongly.



FIG 8. Tshe mdo milks a yak. Sometimes her husband helps her tether calves if he is free, which saves a lot of time when she is milking.



FIG 9. Tshe mdo pours milk into a white bucket. After she milks all the yaks, there are more than two buckets of milk. Part of the milk was used for milk tea and to make butter and cheese.



FIG 10A. Rdo b+he waits to untie the next calf while Dar skyid milks.



FIG 10B. After milking, Tshe mdo pours milk into a pot that will be heated, the first process in making butter and cheese. This is her daily summer work. The boiling process takes about one hour.



FIG 11. Tshe mdo stirs the milk as it boils to ensure it does not scorch.



FIG 12 After boiling the milk, hot milk is poured into the milk separator to ensure that unclean particles do not mix with milk, such as yak hair or yak dung. A piece of gauze is usually placed on top of the milk separator; milk is usually poured into the milk separator with a water scoop. The white part pours from the milk separator is buttermilk; the yellow is butter. It takes about one hour to separate buttermilk and butter.



FIG 13. Tshe mdo pours hot milk into the milk separator.



FIG 14. The milk separator separates buttermilk and butter.



IG 15. Tshe mdo squeezes buttermilk from the butter and puts the butter into another pot with cold water, preventing the butter from melting.



FIG 16. Tshe mdo kneads the butter.



FIG 17. Tshe mdo slaps the butter with her right palm. She uses her left hand to take turns to be sure she slaps every side of the butter to ensure less water is in the butter.



FIG 18. Tshe mdo separates the butter in the pot with cold water. The basin (right) has two globs of butter with water slapped out.



FIG 19. Tshe mdo washes the milk separator daily.



FIG 20. To release the water from the butter, Tshe mdo holds a slab of butter bigger than her fist in her left palm and slaps it with her right hand, making sure she slaps every side of the butter. She slaps the butter until there is no more water in the butter.



FIG 21. Tshe mdo stirs the buttermilk.



FIG 22. After boiling the buttermilk, Tshe mdo pours it through a filter.



FIG 23. After straining out the whey, she pours cheese into a pot.



FIG 24. Tshe mdo dries cheese the same day she removes it from the buttermilk. It spoils if kept in a tent or house. If the weather cooperates (high enough temperatures), the cheese needs only two days to dry.



FIG 25. Tshe mdo sold butter and cheese to a county store in late autumn. She kept some butter and cheese for her family's daily consumption of milk tea, and yogurt. Selling forty kilograms of butter and fifty kilograms of cheese meant she earned 10,000 RMB in 2023.



When I was about seven, my maternal grandmother, Rta b+ho, said, "Women's house chores are never done; even if you finish them all today, you will have to start over tomorrow." I didn't understand this until I got older and did house chores alone.

I asked Grandmother questions while she was doing house chores, especially while she was making butter, e.g., "Why are we making butter and cheese in summer, not in winter?"

This was a favorite question because she would respond with a story:

Long ago, there was only summer. Livestock had enough grass to eat, the grass never turned yellow, water never froze, women made butter and cheese daily, and people ate yogurt and drank milk daily. People were satisfied because they had a continuous supply of food. But then two groups of women fought, hitting each other with butter. The local mountain deity noticed this and punished those people with four seasons to educate them to cherish butter and cheese. Consequently, we make as much butter and cheese as possible in summer. If we don't work hard in summer, we won't have enough butter and cheese in winter.

Grandmother also said her first mother was her biological mother, and her second mothers were the female yaks she milked because she drank endless milk.

Grandmother was busy every summer milking twenty yaks from five to seven AM, boiling the milk, and then making butter and cheese, which might have required a whole afternoon.

I also had the daily duty of tying and untying calves while Grandmother was milking. After we untied the milk yaks, I herded them to the mountain. The calves remained tied until I herded their mothers to the other side of the mountain to ensure they wouldn't return quickly to nurse their calves.

Some yaks were strongly attracted to their calves and didn't want to be separated. Sometimes when I herded them to the middle of the mountain, they ran back to the yak enclosure, looking for their calves, especially some yaks that had recently given birth. I spent a lot of energy chasing them and sometimes angrily threw pebbles at them. Grandmother scolded me when she saw this.

When I returned home, Grandmother boiled milk, gave me bread, and poured a bowl of milk for me. I dipped my right index finger in the milk, spread a little on my forehead, and enjoyed thinking it was the most delicious food in the world. I dared not waste even a little because Grandmother said milk was precious to those calves who shared the milk with us.

I played with neighbor kids who were also herding calves after I herded calves to the opposite side of the mountain. Sometimes I focused on playing and didn't immediately notice some female yaks return to nurse their calves. When I saw them, I ran as quickly as I could, chasing those yaks with their calves, but they ran here and there, and sometimes I could not separate them. When Grandmother milked yaks in the evening, she noticed that some female yaks had very little milk and then scolded me.

CONCLUSION

Many things have value at a particular time for certain people. Some young people today with family roots in herding life may question the worth of this photo essay as they now value cars, houses, and

money and do not depend on the livelihood earned from herding and making animal products such as butter and cheese. Some of my childhood peers are unlikely to return to herding because of social pressure. Furthermore, many youths who attend school and go on to seek careers in towns and cities may not participate in the life this essay portrays and, therefore, may have a limited understanding of their elders' lives.

In recording these details, I present the herding life of a local woman in 2022 and encourage others to do the same to record these disappearing stories of Tibetan pastoral life.

TIBETAN TERMS

'dogs thag འདོགས་ཐག

be'u rdang བེའུ་རང་།

cha ru ཇ་རུ།

dar skyid དར་སྒྱིད།

g.yang shar གཡང་ཤར།

g.yu dkar 'om lung

གཡུ་དཀར་འོམ་ལུང་།

mtsho byang མཚོ་བྱང་།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

mtsho sngon po མཚོ་སྒོན་པོ།

nor rdang རྩོད་རང་།

phur ba ཕུར་བ།

rdang རང་།

rdo b+he རྩོ་རྩེ།

rkang tsha ཀང་ཇ།

rna skud རྩ་སུད།

rta b+ho རྩ་རྩོ་

ske thug སྒེ་ཐུག

thul ma ཐུལ་མ།

tshe mdo ཇེ་མདོ།

CHINESE TERMS

Dongxiang 东乡

Gangcha 刚察

Haibei 海北

Han 汉

Hui 回

Qinghai 青海

Yaxiu 压秀

Yikewulan 伊克乌兰

TRANSLATION

ནང་དོན་གནད་བསྟུན།

བད་ཆད་གཙ་པོ།

ངའི་འཆོ་བ་དང་གཡུ་ཡི་སྒྲིལ།

ང་ནི་༡༩༥༡ལོར་མཚོ་ལྷན་ཁྱིམ་མཚོ་བྱང་ཁུལ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ཆ་རྒྱུ་ཡིག་མོ་ལྷན་པའི་འབྲེག་བྱིས་ཞིག་གི་ལྷན་
 རང་དུ་སྐྱེས། ང་ལ་གཅེན་མོ་གཉིས་དང་གཅེན་པོ་གཅིག་ཡོད། གཅེན་མོ་ཆེ་བ་ལྷན་པོ་ནི་༡༩༧༥ལོར་སྐྱེས།
 གཅེན་མོ་ཆུང་བ་ལྷན་པོ་ཆེ་ཤིང་ནི་༡༩༧༧ལོར་སྐྱེས། ལུ་པོ་འཛིགས་ཀྱིས་རྩོམ་ཅི་ཅི་༡༩༧༩ལོར་སྐྱེས། ངའི་ཨ་པ་
 དཔལ་བཟང་ནི་༡༩༤༥ལོར་སྐྱེས་ཤིང་༡༩༧༩ལོར་ཆེ་ཡི་མཉམ་ཞུགས། ཁོང་ནི་སྤྲན་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་པས་ཨ་
 མས་ང་རང་བཅོམ་བའི་དུས་སུ་མོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་གཤམ་བྱས་ཐོང་། ངའི་མ་ལྷོགས་ཀྱི་ཡང་ཕྱི་བདེ་མཚོ་ནི་
 ༡༩༠༥ལོར་སྐྱེས་ཤིང་༡༩༥༤ ལོར་ཆེ་ལས་འདས།

༡༠༠༩ལོར་ང་རང་ལོ་ནི་ཤུ་ཅུ་ལོ་ན། ཨ་མས་བཤད་རྒྱུ་ང་རང་ལོ་གསུམ་ལོན་པའི་
 སྐྱེས་སྐར་ལ། ཡང་ཕྱིས་ང་རང་ལ་ཆོ་རེད་ནད་མེད། བདེ་ཁིང་སྤྱིད་པའི་སྒོར་ལམ་བརྒྱབས་ནས་མོ་རང་
 གི་གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་དེ་ང་ལ་ལེགས་སྐྱེས་སུ་གནང་། ང་ཆོའི་ཕྱེ་བར་བྱིས་པ་ལོ་གསུམ་ལ་ལོན་སྐབས་ཀྱི་ལོ་
 དེའི་ལོ་སར་གྱི་ནིཾ་མོར་ཁོ་ཆོར་ལོ་ལྷན་གྱི་མཇེད་སྤོ་སྤེལ་བའི་དཔེ་ཡོད། ལོ་ལྷན་གྱི་ནིཾ་དེར་ངའི་
 སྐུ་ལལ་ཆེ་བ་བཞར་ཆེས་ཤུལ་ཏུ་རལ་བ་ཐུང་ཐུང་ཞིག་མ་གཏོགས་སྟག་མེད། ཡང་ཕྱིས་གཡུ་དེ་སྤྱད་པ་
 ཞིག་ལ་བརྒྱས་ནས་ངའི་རལ་བ་དང་མཉམ་དུ་སྟོས། ཨ་མ་དང་གཅེན་མོས་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་ན་གཡུ་དེ་ལལ་
 ཆོར་ལོ་བརྒྱ་ཡི་སྒོར་ལ་ཁ་ཆེའི་ཆོང་བ་ཞིག་གི་ལག་ནས་ཉོས་པ་རེད། ཨ་མས་གཡུ་དེ་ང་རང་གཉེན་སྒྲིག་
 རིག་བར་དུ་ཉར་ཚགས་བྱས།

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པར་དང་པོ། ༡༧༤ལོར་ཡང་ཕྱིས་ང་ལ་གནང་བའི་གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ།



ངེད་མིང་སྲིང་བཞི་བོའི་ནང་ནས་ང་ནི་པ་ཡུལ་རྒྱབ་ལ་བསྐྱར་ནས་གནས་ཡུལ་འགྲིམས་མཁན་དེ་ཡིན།
གཅེན་མོ་གཉིས་དང་གཅེན་པོས་སོ་སོའི་སྐུ་ཡ་བཅས་ནས་རང་ཕྱེད་ནང་ནས་འཁོར་བ་བསྐྱངས།
༡༠༡༠ལོའི་ངའི་གཉེན་སྒྲིག་གི་ཉེན་མོར་ཨ་མས་གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་དེ་ང་ལ་ཕྱིར་ཐུང་ནས། གཡུ་དེས་ང་
དང་ངའི་བྱིས་མི་བར་གྱི་དྲངས་གཙང་སྣང་མེད་ཀྱི་འབྲེལ་བ་མཚོན་ཟེར། དེ་བས་ན་ངས་གཡུ་དེ་ནོམ་པ་
ཅ་ཆེན་ཞིག་ཏུ་ངོས་བཟུང་ནས་བདག་ཡག་པོ་བྱས། གཡུ་དེར་ང་སྤྱི་ཡིན་པ་དང་གང་ནས་འོང་བ་དྲན་
སྐུལ་བྱེད་པའི་རུས་པ་ལྡན་པ་མ་ཟད། ང་ཆོའི་ཕྱེ་བའི་སྐུ་རྒྱུ་རིག་གནས་ཀྱི་རིན་ཐང་ཡང་དྲན་པར་
བྱེད། ང་ལ་གཡུ་དེ་བཅོང་འདོད་ཀྱི་ཀུན་སྒྲོང་སྤྱི་ཚུལ་ཡང་ཡིད་ལ་སྐྱེས་མ་སྤྱོད་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཡང་མི་སྲིད། གཡུ་
དེ་ནི་སྤྱིར་བཏང་གི་རྒྱུ་ཆ་ཅས་མིན། དེར་བདག་ལ་སྒོ་སྤྲོས་སྦྱེད་པ་དང་། སྤང་སྦྱོབ་བྱེད་པ། ལྷང་ཏ་
དར་བར་བྱེད་པའི་རུས་པ་ལྡན།

༡༠༡༡ལོར་ངའི་བྱ་རྒྱུ་དགའ་ལོར་བྱ་སྐྱེས། ཁོ་རང་ངའི་བྱ་ཕྱག་གཅིག་བྱ་ཡིན། ངས་
གཡུ་ཡི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་དེ་རང་གི་བྱ་འཕམ་ཡང་ན་ཁོའི་མ་འོངས་བའི་རྒྱང་མ་ལ་སྤྱོད་འདོད། གལ་སྲིད་ང་ལ་བྱ་མོ་
ཞིག་ཡོད་ཆོ། བྱ་མོ་དེར་སྐྱེན་ངེས།

༡༠༡༢ ལོར་ངས་ཆབ་ཆ་གོང་རྒྱུ་ནས་བོད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་ཆ་དང་བོད་ལ་ཉོ་འདོད་སྐྱེས་ནས་ཁྲོམ་
སྤང་ལུལ། ཆོང་ཁང་ཞིག་གི་ནང་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ན་ཆོང་བདག་གིས་ངའི་སྐྱེ་ཡི་གཡུ་དེ་མཐོང་མ་ཐག ངའི་
ཅིང་ལ་བཅར་ནས་གཡུ་དེ་ངས་བདག་ཁས་ནས་ལོ་ག་ཆོད་འཁོར་བ་དང་དེ་བཅོང་མིན་སྒྲོར་དྲིས། གཡུ་དེ་
ང་ལ་མཚོན་ན་རྒྱ་རྒྱུ་གཡུ་ཆེན་ཤིག་ཡིན་པས། ངས་ཆོང་བདག་ལ་དེའི་སྒྲོར་ཅི་ཡང་མ་བཤད།

སྤྱིར་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་ནི་བྱང་མེད་ཆོའི་སྐྱེས་གཟུགས་མཛེས་པར་གཏོང་བྱེད་རྒྱུ་ཆ་གཙོ་བོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་
ལ། བྱིས་ཆང་ཞིག་གི་རྒྱ་ལོར་གྱི་རིན་ཐང་མཚོན་བྱེད་ཀྱང་ཡིན། གལ་སྲིད་བྱིས་ཆང་ཞིག་གི་བྱ་མོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་
རྒྱུ་མང་པོ་ཡོད་ན། བྱིས་ཆང་དེ་ནི་ཕྱག་པོ་ཡིན་པ་དང་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་གོ་གནས་ཀྱང་མཐོན་པོ་ཡོད་པ་
སྤྱོད་མ་དགོས། ལོ་ངོ་ཉི་ཤུ་དང་སྤྱི་མེད་ཡར་སྤོང་ལ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་དེ་ལྟར་མང་པོ་བདག་ཁས་ན་

སོ་ཁྲིའི་འཁོར་སྤྱོད་དང་བཅོ་ལས་རིག་ཆ་ལ་གྱི་འབེལ་རྒྱས་དང་བསྐྱར་ནས་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་གྱི་
དབྱིབས་དང་རྒྱ་ཆ་སོགས་ལ་འགྱུར་བ་ཆེན་པོ་ཐེབས། རྩོན་ཆད་མའི་ལག་བཅོ་བྱས་པའམ་རྟབས་བདེ་ཡི་
འཕྲུལ་ཆས་པགོལ་སྤྱོད་བྱས་ནས་དབྱིབས་གོར་གོར་དང་བྱར་གསུམ་ཅན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་མ་གཏོགས་ཐོན་
སྤྱོད་བྱས་མེད། ཉེ་རབས་ལྷ་འཕྲུལ་ཆས་མང་པོ་པགོལ་ནས་དབྱིབས་དང་རྒྱས་པ་མི་འདྲ་བའི་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་
མང་པོ་བཅོ་སྐྱར་བྱེད་ཀྱིན་ཡོད།

ང་ཚོའི་ཐེ་བའི་སྒོ་ལ་ལྷར་ན་བྱིས་ཆང་གི་བདག་མོ་ལ་བྱིས་ཆང་དེའི་རྒྱན་ཆའི་བདག་དབང་
ཡོད། ཁོ་མོ་ཚོས་དུས་རྒྱུན་དུ་རྒྱུན་ཆ་འདོགས་པ་དང་ཉར་ཆགས་བྱེད་པ་རེད། ངའི་ཨ་ནེ་ལ་གཟི་ཡི་སྒྲེ་
རྒྱན་དང་ཐེང་བ་མང་པོ་ཡོད། གཅེན་མོ་ཆེ་བ་ལོ་དྲུག་ལ་སོར་སྐབས་མོ་ནས་རྒྱན་ཨ་ནེ་ཆང་ལ་སོང་ནས་
ཆེད་མོ་ཆེ་བ་རེད། མོས་བཤད་པ་ལྷར་ན་མོ་ཨ་མའི་སྒྲེ་རྒྱན་ལ་དགའ་བ་སྐྱེས་པས། ཨ་ནེས་མོ་ལ་སྒྲེ་རྒྱན་
གཅིག་གངས་དུ་བཅུག ཨ་ནེ་ལ་མོ་རང་གི་རྒྱན་ཆ་ཡི་བདག་དབང་ཡོད་པས་མོའི་སྒྲེ་རྒྱན་གཞན་ལ་ཞེར་
ནའང་མོའི་བྱི་ག་དང་བྱིས་མི་ཚོས་མོ་ལ་ཅི་ཡང་མི་བཤད། མོས་རང་གི་རྒྱན་ཆ་བཙོང་འདོད་པའམ་
ཡང་ན་གཞན་ལ་སྒྲེན་པས་མ་ན་ཡང་མོ་རང་གིས་ཐག་གཅོད་བྱེད་ཆོག ལོ་དྲུ་མའི་རྗེས་སུ་ང་ཚོས་ཨ་
ཅས་བདམས་པའི་སྒྲེ་རྒྱན་དེ་གཟི་རྒྱ་ཆེན་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་ཤེས།

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དེས་མིའི་ལུས་སྤྱོད་གི་བཟེ་སྒྲན་ནང་གི་དུག་དག་སེལ་བ་རེད། གཤག་བཅོས་ལེགས་འབྲུབ་བྱུང་རྗེས་གཟི་
དེའི་སྤྱོད་གི་དཀར་ཐེག་དག་ཕྱིར་གསལ་པོར་མངོན་ཞིང་འདྲངས་ཡང་རྒྱས། ཨ་ཅེས་གཟི་དེས་སྤྱང་
འཁོར་བཞིན་མོ་རང་སྤྱང་སྒྱུབ་བྱས་པར་བསམ་ཡོད།

ང་ལ་མཆོན་ན་རྒྱན་ཆ་ཡི་དག་རྒྱན་དགར་རྒྱ་ཏ་ཅང་དཀའ་མོ་རེད། ཨ་མ་དང་ཨ་ཅེ་ཆེ་བ་
གཉིས་ཀྱིས་རྒྱན་ཆའི་དག་རྒྱན་སྒྲོར་ལ་འབྲེལ་བཤད་གསལ་བོམི་ཤེས་རུང་། ཁོ་ཆོས་རྒྱན་ཆ་ལག་ལ་
འཛིན་པ་དང་། རེག་པ། སོ་འདྲེབས་པ། ལ་དོག་དང་མདོག་གི་གསལ་ཆད་ལ་ལྟ་པ། ཉི་འོད་འོག་ནས་
མདོག་གི་འབྱར་སྤངས་སོགས་ལ་བརྟག་ནས་རྒྱན་ཆ་ཡི་དག་རྒྱན་དགར་བྱུང།

སྟེ་རྒྱན་གྱི་རིན་ཐང་ཆེ་ཆུང་ནི་དེའི་རྒྱ་ཆ། རྒྱ་སྤྱུལ། གསར་རྟིང་སོགས་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་དམ་པོ་
ཡོད། སྟེ་རྒྱན་རྟིང་བ་དག་ནི་ལག་སྒྲུབ་བཟང་བའི་བཟོ་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་སྤྱུས་ཀ་བཟང་ལ་ལྟ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱ་
ཆ་བཀོལ་ནས་བཟོས་ཡོད་པས་རིན་ཐང་ཆེ། དེ་མིན་སྟེ་རྒྱན་རྟིང་བ་དག་གིས་རྒྱ་བདག་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྒོ་བ་
ཐང་དང་རིག་གནས་ཤིག་གི་རིན་ཐང་ཡང་མཆོན་བྱུང། དེར་སྐབས་མི་སྤྱི་ཡོན་ཡང་སྤྱོད་བ་རྒྱན་མ་དང་
སྟེ་རྒྱན་རྒྱན་མ་སོགས་གང་འདོད་དུ་བྱ་བྱུང་པས། སྟེ་རྒྱན་གྱི་སྤྱན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རིན་ཐང་དེ་ཡལ།

གང་ལྟར་སྟེ་རྒྱན་རྟིང་བ་དག་ལ་རིན་ཐང་གཞལ་དུ་མེད། དེ་དག་གིས་མི་སྤྱིར་དང་། ཁྱིམ་
ཆང་། རྩེ་བ་སོགས་རྒྱན་དབར་དང་མི་རབས་མ་ཕྱི་བར་ལ་རིག་གནས་དོན་སྤྱིང་ཁྱུང་པར་བ་ཞིག་བརྒྱན་
སྤེལ་བྱུང་བྱུང། སྟེ་རྒྱན་རྟིང་བ་ཞིག་གིས་ས་གནས་ཀྱི་སྤེལ་རྒྱན་རིག་གནས་དང་ཁྱིམ་ཆང་ཞིག་གི་ཁྱིམ་
མིའི་བར་གྱི་འབྲེལ་བ་དམ་པོ་དེ་མཆོན་བྱུང། སྟེ་རྒྱན་ཞིག་མི་རབས་ནས་མི་རབས་བརྒྱན་པ་དེས་ཁྱིམ་མི་
ཆོའི་བར་གྱི་དྲངས་གཙང་གི་བརྩེ་བ་དེ་བརྒྱན་ཡོད། གཡུ་ཡི་སྟེ་རྒྱན་འདི་ང་ལ་མཆོན་ན་གཅིག་ལས་
གཉིས་མེད་དང་རིན་ཐང་གཞལ་དུ་མེད་པའི་རྒྱན་ཆ་ཞིག་ཡིན། རྒྱན་ཆ་འདི་ནི་ང་རང་བདེ་སྤྱིད་ཀྱི་འཆོ་
བ་རོལ་པ་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ནམས་ཀྱི་ཆོགས་གསོག་པར་བྱེད་པའི་རྟེན་ཡང་ཡིན།

པར་གཉིས་པ་དང་གསུམ་པ། གཡོན་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་པར་ནི་༢༠༡༧ལོའི་དགའ་སྟོན་ཞིག་གི་སྐབས་སུ་
ངས་གཡུ་ཡི་སྟེ་རྒྱན་བཏགས་པའི་རྣམ་པ། གཡས་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་པར་ནི་༢༠༡༧ ལོར་དེད་ཆང་གི་ཟེ་ལིང་གི་
སྤྱོད་ཤག་ནང་ནས་ངས་གཡུ་ཡི་སྟེ་རྒྱན་བཏགས་ནས་པར་དུ་བསྒྲིན་པ།
པར་བ། པར་རྒྱུ།



LITERATURE

OBEDIENCE

Gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་ཤྭ་རྩིན་ལས། (Gerichengli 格日成立)*

Black yak hair tents were pitched on each side of a creek that snaked through endless flat grassland. Yaks, sheep, and horses comfortably grazed along the brook. As a colt galloped to its mother, neighing with its tail in the air, a flock of lambs frolicked near the river. A lazy watchdog sprawled, barking mindlessly at the vigorous lambs. Prayer flags tied to the tops of two poles along a tent's entrance fluttered in a gentle breeze. A seven-year-old barefoot girl with messy hair emerged from the tent, curious to see why the watchdog was barking. She was short, so people called her Little Girl. She reentered the tent after glancing at the sleepy dog.

A woman with rough overworked hands took a kettle from the adobe stove in the middle of the tent and poured milk tea into Little Girl's wooden bowl. Little Girl sat by the woman and reported, "Mother, the dog barked at lambs running on the river banks."

"Finish your breakfast quickly and take the calves out to graze," her mother said.

Little Girl nodded while picking her bowl up from the ground, sipping some tea, and selecting a piece of fried bread from a green plastic basin beside her. Her mother walked outside as Little Girl munched on the bread. After breakfast, Little Girl got ready for the day. She pulled on her leather boots and wrapped herself in a sheepskin robe. Next, she poured milk tea into a battered army-green aluminum container, wrapped the neck with a piece of plastic, and tied it tightly with yak hair yarn to stop tea from seeping out. She poked two pieces of bread wrapped in plastic in her robe pouch and walked out of the tent.

Her mother had untethered the calves and tied them in pairs with strong short, yak hair ropes. When Little Girl came near, her mother asked, "Did you bring food?"

* Gu ru 'phrin las. 2023. Obedience. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:339-353.

Little Girl joyfully responded, "I brought bread and a bottle of milk tea. I'm going to have a splendid lunch today!"

Her mother tossed a piece of dried yak dung at a pair of calves that seemed ready to rush to where their mothers were grazing. The calves bolted when the dung bounced near them and ran to join the other calves.

"Drive those calves to a rich grassland, and don't let them run to their mothers and nurse!" Little Girl's Mother ordered.

Little Girl swung a slingshot over her head and responded, "Yes, Mother. Beat me if a calf nurses its mother today!"

Her mother stood and watched her daughter drive the calves to where neighbor children herded their family's calves.

Little Girl soon squirmed out of her robe and pulled off her shoes, unable to bear the scorching sunshine. She stretched her robe on the ground and lay on it, covering her head with her red sash but periodically checking on the calves to ensure none had joined their mothers far from where she was herding them.

A calf had rushed from the calves the day before and joined the other yaks while Little Girl was napping. Her mother had scolded her when she tried to milk the yak and realized its calf had nursed all the milk. Today, Little Girl vigilantly watched each calf's movement, sure her mother would not forgive her if she made the same mistake again.

At noon, Little Girl unwrapped the plastic and started eating lunch but noticed a pair of calves walking toward the family's other grazing yaks. She left the bread on her robe and ran to the calves in her red leggings and flapping fabric shirt. Once she got near, she picked up stones and hurled them at the two naughty calves, forcing them back to the other calves.

She returned, sprawled on her robe panting as beads of sweat gathered on her broad forehead and flowed down her cheeks onto her robe. After a few minutes, she raised her head and plucked flowers stuck between her toes. She took the aluminum container from under her robe and untied the yak hair thread. A drop of milk trickled down her chin, leaving a white streak as she gulped milk tea.

She belched after drinking and gobbled some bread.

In the distance, she saw two neighbor children watering their family's calves. They normally herded together. Little Girl decided to offer bread and milk tea to the neighbor boy if he herded calves with her. She took a sip of tea and bit a piece of bread, wondering why Big Head, as everyone called him, wasn't herding calves with her but with a neighbor girl. "Maybe Big Head is attracted to that girl because she has a nice voice and knows many songs. Her mother is a well-known local singer and taught her many songs. Big Head probably enjoys listening," she thought.

Little Girl drove her family's calves back home in the early evening. With her mother, they untied the calves from one another and tethered them to long ropes. Her mother clutched a calf's neck rope and pulled the calf to where other calves were tied. She tied the calf and told her daughter, "Go drive the mother yaks back."

"Yes, Mother," Little Girl replied.

Her empty tea bottle fell on the ground as she untied her sash. She tossed her robe and sash away and rushed to her family's yaks. As she ran, Little Girl could hear the mother yaks grazing near her family yak enclosure and their calves mooing to each other.

In the meantime, Little Girl's mother went into the tent, washing her hands after scooping water from a wooden bucket and pouring it into a basin. She opened a small, rectangular wooden box divided into three parts by two boards. One part contained a big piece of butter, one dried cheese, and the third roasted barley flour. She took a piece of butter from the big chunk and stuck it onto the upper part of her milking pail. She held the milking bucket in her right hand and a thick black and white yak hair rope in her left hand and went out.

Little Girl drove the mother yaks into the yak enclosure. Her mother placed the bucket on the ground and tethered the mother yaks. She then hobbled a mother yak with the black and white rope as Little Girl untied a calf.

The calf rushed to its mother and nursed crazily. Little Girl grasped the calf's neck rope when white foam appeared around its

mouth and tied it to the tether rope. She stood next to her mother, who sang milking songs while milking.

Little Girl drove the rest of the family's yaks and the horses home at sunset.

Dogs always barked aimlessly when darkness came. In the tent, mother and daughter ate meat soup and *rtsam pa* under the dim light of a flickering butter lamp. A small fire was burning in the stove. The noise of slurping soup broke the silence in the tent. Little Girl considered asking her mother something, but her mother's glum face made her swallow what she was about to say.

Little Girl slept on a dried yak skin beside her mother on one side of the tent. She snuggled into her sheepskin robe and another of her mother's robes. A folded robe covered with her sash was her pillow. Unable to sleep, she counted glistening stars in the blue sky through the hole in the top of their family's tent. Losing interest in the stars, she turned her head to her mother's side, asking, "Mother, are you still awake?"

Her mother covered her head with her robe and responded softly, "Yeah."

Little Girl was glad that she could ask the question on her mind. "Can you sing?"

After a pause, her mother said, "Yeah."

"Do you know many songs?"

"No, only a few."

"Is it hard to learn songs?"

Her mother murmured something she couldn't hear.

"What? I didn't hear clearly. Is it hard to learn songs? Can you teach me some songs?"

The mother turned, faced her daughter, and said, "Songs are easy to learn. I'm sleepy. Let me sleep. I'll teach you tomorrow night if you herd the calves well."

Little Girl broke into a big smile and let her mother sleep.

The following day, Little Girl drove her family's calves to the usual place where she often herded her calves. Later, the neighbor girl and boy joined her. The neighbor girl was taller than her peers

in their tribe, so locals called her Taller Girl. They herded the calves together and sat next to each other in a field of colorful flowers. Taller Girl picked a marsh marigold, sniffed, handed it to Big Head, and announced, "What a nice smell."

Big Head took it from her plump little hand, sniffed, and said, "You're right. The smell is really nice," and handed it back to Taller Girl, who said, "Keep it. I am giving it to you."

Big Head looked at the flower's petals and handed the flower to Little Girl. As Little Girl was ready to take it from Big Head, Taller Girl grabbed Big Head's hand, exclaiming, "I gave it to you, not ..."

Little Girl plucked a marsh marigold, showed it to Taller Girl, and declared, "I can pick flowers by myself."

Taller Girl squinted at Little Girl, said nothing, looked around, and picked a bunch of marsh marigolds. Big Head grasped Little Girl's hand when she wanted to pick more and said, "Don't pick flowers. You won't grow taller if you pick flowers. Whenever I tried to pick flowers, my grandmother said, 'If you pick flowers, you'll not grow as tall as your father because you kill the flowers when you pick them. A supernatural creature doesn't let you grow taller as punishment for killing the flowers.'"

Taller Girl giggled as Little Girl stopped picking flowers. Taller Girl picked more flowers, held them, and said, "I'm taller than you, so I don't need to worry about growing taller."

Little Girl's only response was to give her flowers to Big Head, who took them, paused a second, and returned them with, "You don't have any flowers, so keep them."

Big Head turned to Taller Girl and said, "We won't compare who has more flowers. We can play another game. Let's sing and see who the best singer is."

Taller Girl had a great voice and knew more songs than Big Head and Little Girl. She grabbed Big Head's arm and said, "Great, let's sing!"

Little Girl tilted her head in disagreement and glanced at Taller Girl's blunt nose, protruding cheeks, and small eyes. She then looked at Big Head's round fish eyes below his thick eyebrows and

sharp nose. She tried to say something to Big Head, but he didn't give her a chance, announcing, "Taller Girl, you sing first since you know many songs."

Taller Girl smiled, stood, tilted her head to the left, touched her left cheek with her left palm, held her right hand in the air, and sang mesmerizing Big Head and Little Girl.

One of Taller Girl's calves suddenly left the herd of calves and headed toward where the other yaks were grazing. Taller Girl stopped singing and quickly announced, "I have to drive the calf back into the herd of calves. My mother will scold me if it joins my family's yaks," and raced toward the calf.

Big Head stood and ran after her saying, "I'll help you!"

Little Girl watched and pondered, "Why did Big Head help her? Why did he not stay with me? Maybe she sings well, and he likes her."

A few hours later, they drove their calves back home.

At dusk, Little Girl and her mother noticed one of their yaks in Taller Girl's yak enclosure. Taller Girl's tall mother helped them drive the yak out from her family's enclosure. When they finished, Taller Girl's mother told Little Girl, "You and Taller Girl are relatives. You should like each other and never fight when you herd calves together."

Little Girl nodded and ran after her mother, who quickly drove the yak home. They tied it when they got home and walked into their tent.

Little Girl lit a butter lamp on her family's shrine table and recited mantras while her mother added fuel to the stove and put a pot on the stove. Little Girl looked at the pot and asked, "Mother, what's in the pot?"

"Leftover meat soup we cooked last night."

They went to bed after supper.

As usual, Little Girl slept next to her mother. She pulled her robe slightly over her head and said, "Mother, you promised to teach me songs last night. I herded calves well today."

"OK. What song do you want to learn?"

"I don't know any songs. Teach me whatever you know."

"I'll teach you a short song."

She sang two verses to demonstrate, turned to her daughter, and said, "Now, you sing them."

Little Girl cleared her throat and took a deep breath. Hearing her high-pitched voice, she stopped.

"Good, keep singing. You have a nice voice," her mother encouraged.

"Don't lie."

"No! You sing well."

Little Girl started singing hesitantly but soon stopped, confessing, "I forgot the lyrics."

Her mother repeated the lyrics several times and asked her to sing again. Covering her head with her robe, Little Girl tried to sing.

"Don't be silly! There's no reason to be shy with your mother."

Little Girl uncovered her head and said, "It's my first time to sing."

She cleared her throat again and sang the first verse, then stopped declaring she had forgotten the second verse again.

"Stupid girl. First, you should memorize the lyrics. Otherwise, how can you sing?" chastised her mother.

The mother repeated the lyrics several times before announcing, "Let's sleep. I'm sleepy. You can practice tomorrow."

Little Girl agreed, and while her mother soon snored beside her, she inaudibly repeated the lyrics.

The next day, the three calf herders were again having lunch together. Little Girl handed her milk tea container to Big Head and said, "Drink milk tea. You said you were thirsty."

Watching her big, dark eyes, Big Head took it from Little Girl and said, "My mother filled my tea container this morning, but I forgot to bring it with me."

As he gulped, tea coursed from his chin to his neck. The girls burst into laughter when he stopped drinking and dried his neck.

He returned the tea container to Little Girl and said, "I drank half of your tea. I was too thirsty."

Little Girl drank some of the tea and assured, "I'm not very thirsty, so it's OK."

Taller Girl fumbled in her robe pouch and eventually took out a piece of *rtsam pa* wrapped in a plastic bag. She placed it on her lap and continued groping in her robe pouch but found nothing. "I also forgot to bring my cup with me. May I drink a bit of your tea?"

Looking at Big Head, who was munching on a piece of baked bread, Little Girl said, "There's only enough tea for two."

Big Head picked up the tea container from the ground near Little Girl, handed it to Taller Girl, and exclaimed, "I'm not going to drink more. You two drink it!"

Taller Girl drank, then asked, "Who wants to eat *rtsam pa*? I'll give you a piece."

Big Head declined.

Little Girl shook her head and took a bite of her bun.

Glancing at their calves, Taller Girl said, "Our calves are busy grazing, so we can play games now. I sang yesterday. You two didn't. Now it's your turn."

Big Head and Little Girl looked at each other and smiled. Little Girl stuck out her tongue and said, "You sing first."

Big Head said, "You sing first, then I'll sing."

Little Girl put her head down, looked at the bun she held, and cleared her throat each time her herding mates encouraged her to start. Sweat gathered on her forehead and nose. Big Head encouraged, "Don't be shy. You must have a voice as nice as your mother's."

Little Girl replied without looking at Big Head, "I don't know any songs."

Taller Girl said, "You told me this morning your mother taught you a song last night."

Big Head said, "Sing the song you learned last night!"

Little Girl raised her head, smiled, and confided, "I forgot the

lyrics."

Big Head encouraged, "Well, just sing the part you remember."

Taller Girl checked in each direction, "Don't be reluctant. Nobody's watching."

Although trembling, Little Girl took a long breath and started singing. After the first verse, Taller Girl heartily laughed. Little Girl immediately stopped and covered her head with her hands. Big Head touched Little Girl's head, saying, "Keep singing. You have a lovely voice!"

"No, I'm not going to sing. Taller Girl was laughing," protested Little Girl.

Taller Girl said, "I wasn't laughing at you. You sing well."

Little Girl lifted her head a few seconds later, looked at Big Head, and announced, "It's your turn."

Big Head put the piece of baked bread on his lap into his robe pouch. Looking at the girls, he smiled, stood, and ran. Taller Girl's piece of round *rtsam pa* rolled onto the ground from her lap as she stood and chased Big Head. Little Girl watched, sure she would catch him and bring him back. Taller Girl grabbed his robe, causing him to fall. Big Head sprawled on the ground, looked at Taller Girl, and gestured for her to sit beside him.

Meanwhile, Little Girl finished eating the bun and drank the rest of her tea. She was still feeling very shy but grudgingly joined them.

That night, Little Girl and her mother sat near the stove with the only light in the tent provided by light from the stove.

"Let's go to bed. I have already taught you all verses."

Little Girl leaned against her mother and pleaded, "Let me practice again. I'm stupid and will forget the lyrics and melody."

"Practice tomorrow while herding the calves."

"Our neighbor boy said I have a good voice. I should learn more songs."

Little Girl's mother stood and said, "It's enough for you to know one song since you're not going to be a public singer. Singing

doesn't make you a good girl."

"What makes me a good girl?"

"A good girl herds calves and yaks well, is filial, obeys her parents in everything, respects elders, and doesn't gossip about others."

The two went out to pee and returned to their sleeping space. Little Girl, wrapped in her warm robes, began reciting song lyrics. Disturbed by her daughter's recitations, her mother demanded, "Let me sleep! Chant scriptures rather than recite lyrics."

"Yes, mother."

"Chant Sgrol ma mantras. You'll give birth to sons if you chant many Sgrol ma mantras."

"OK," Little Girl said, chanting a Sgrol ma mantra until she slept.

Big Head and Little Girl were again herding calves a few days later. Little Girl put her head down and sang:

Black yaks are the dew on grass tops of the mountain peaks
The yak herder is the cosmic sun

Big Head stared at her, intoxicated by her pleasant song. Little Girl stopped, "Oh, I can't remember the lyrics. Let me think," and continued a bit later:

Yearlings are the glittering stars in the sky
The shepherd is the milky full moon

Horses are the colorful flowers on the bank of the lake
The horse-herder is the inner jewel of the lake

Little Girl looked at Big Head as she finished singing. He smiled and complimented, "You sing well. Can you sing it again?"

She smiled and said, "I can sing it tomorrow."

Big Head insisted, "But I want to listen to it now. I enjoy

listening to your singing."

Coughing, Little Girl replied, "I can't sing it. My throat is not comfortable. I can sing it for you tomorrow."

Big Head looked into Little Girl's eyes and asked, "Promise?"

She nodded. Big Head smiled, thought a second, and said, "Tomorrow, my family will move to our autumn pasture."

Little Girl added, "My family will move to my family's pasture the day after tomorrow."

Big Head said sadly, "We can't see each other until our families move to our winter pasture. You can learn and sing more songs to me next time we meet."

She modestly replied, "I'm stupid and probably can't learn many songs. My mother taught me the song I just sang for many days. I easily forgot the lyrics, and my mother said I was stupid."

Big Head suddenly stood up, ran from Little Girl, and turned to look back to see if Little Girl was coming to attack him as he peed. There she was, pushing toward him, and soon she succeeded in playfully throwing him on the ground.

...

A month later, Little Girl's family arrived at her family's autumn pasture. Her mother asked her to enter as she stood at the tent entrance. Little Girl came inside and asked, "Mother, what's packed on that horse?"

"Our neighbor's grandmother passed away. It's her corpse."

Little Girl had never seen a corpse and peeked through her family's tent door. She saw a man riding a horse and leading a packed horse behind him. She could see the pack horse carrying something wrapped in white cloth.

Her mother was chanting scriptures and holding a string of beads in her hand but then paused and said, "Don't look at it."

Little Girl reluctantly walked to her mother, sitting near the stove.

"Don't sing at home or in the mountains. Our neighbors are mourning, and we should consider their feelings."

Little Girl nodded and sat by mother, who added, "Death is unpredictable. Chant as many scriptures as possible before you die. If you don't chant scriptures, you'll walk in the thick darkness after you die and be lost in the darkness. If you chant many scriptures, it will lighten the darkness."

Little Girl was frightened and immediately chanted mantras. She then said, "I don't have prayer beads. I need a string of beads."

"You don't need a string of prayer beads. You're a child."

"I need them," she insisted, interrupting her mother's chanting and grabbing a string of her prayer beads.

Little Girl chanted mantras the next day while holding a string of prayer beads and herding her family's yaks on a small hill. She assumed light would guide her soul in the darkness after she died. At night, she reported to her mother that she had recited mantras all day, earning her mother's praise and encouraging her to persist.

Little Girl sobbed one night after her mother scolded her for leaving her family's yaks on the mountain. She dried her eyes with the back of her hand as her mother put several pieces of dried yak dung into the scoop. Piously chanting mantras while blowing over the yak dung in the scoop, she pulled a tent rope through the upper part of the tent, secured it to the tent fabric, and put the scoop handle between the rope and the tent cloth, so the scoop was covered by tent cloth at the tent top.

Little Girl looked at the scoop and asked, "Mother, why did you do that?"

Without looking at her, her mother answered, "Put yak dung representing yaks in a scoop, chant scripture, and blow over the dung if you leave yaks on the mountains at night. Wolves and thieves won't see the yaks left on the mountain once tent cloth covers the dung in the scoop."

Little Girl looked at her mother, "Next time, I'll not leave any yaks on the mountains."

...

Winter came. The tribal families all moved to their winter pastures.

Little Girl was unhappy Big Head's family didn't return to the winter pasture because they had herded yaks together since their families began sharing the winter pasture. Little Girl now herded her family's yaks on the mountains alone, pulled the upper part of her robe over her head, and slept each time she was bored to death while herding. She did not chant scriptures or sing. Wolves attacked her family's yaks and killed one while she was napping one afternoon. Her mother scolded and beat her when she reported what had happened. From that day on, Little Girl dared not nap, and wolves killed no more yaks. Her neighbors commented she would be a great yak herder like her mother, her mother was proud of her, and Little Girl was proud of herself for being a good herder.

Big Head's family eventually returned to the winter pasture, and Little Girl and Big Head herded together again. While sitting on a mountaintop as yaks grazed below them, Little Girl asked, "Why did your family only return to winter pasture yesterday?"

"My family moved to my older sister's land a month after we moved to the autumn pasture."

"Why did your family move there?"

"My sister's mother-in-law got sick when my sister was six months pregnant. Sister's husband took his mother to the hospital, so Sister needed my family's help. Father herded both families' yaks, and Mother helped Sister do house chores."

Big Head looked toward the mountain ranges topped with clouds above and meandering rivers below and gazed at the yaks peacefully grazing on rich grass. "I have not heard you sing for months. You sing very well. Please sing the song you sang last time we were together."

Little Girl was uncomfortable, put her head down, and murmured, "I can't. I forgot the song's lyrics and melody."

"How's it possible to forget the song in a few months? You're lying!"

"I forgot. I haven't sung it for months."

"You have a nice voice and sang that song well. Ask your mother, and she'll teach you."

Little Girl nodded.

...

Little Girl's mother handed her brother a bowl of milk tea and offered him a plate of boiled meat and a knife a bit later. She poured herself tea and took a piece of meat from a basin beside her.

Turning to him, she said, "Your daughter is young and can remarry, so don't worry about her marriage. She's nice. A good man will marry her."

After chewing a piece of meat, her brother replied, "It's all my fault. I thought her ex-husband was good and told her to marry him."

"It's OK. Don't worry. Your family is rich, and many good men want to marry your daughter. No good man will marry my daughter since my family is not rich."

"It's too early to think about your daughter's marriage. She's a little girl."

"She's different with no father to find her a good spouse."

"My friend is a very good man. His family is not rich, but he has two sons. Both are good boys and about Little Girl's age. It's possible to arrange a marriage between Little Girl and one of his sons."

"Great! Now I won't worry much about her marriage."

They continued chatting until he left shortly after the meal.

...

Little Girl and her mother went to bed after supper. Little Girl hesitated, "Mother, I forgot the song you taught me. Please teach me again."

"Let me sleep. I'll teach you later."

"Teach me tonight."

"Why do you want to learn it tonight?"

"I promised Big Head I'd sing it to him tomorrow. He said I have a nice voice and wants to hear that song again."

"You are troublesome. Let me sleep!" her mother scolded, but she was pleased and taught her the song again anyway.

Little Girl learned it quickly, impressing her mother. Little

Girl was so happy imagining Big Head enjoying her song the following day that sleep did not come until midnight.

TIBETAN TERMS

gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།
rtsam pa རྩ་པ།
sgrol ma སྒོ་ལ་མ།

CHINESE TERM

Gerichengli 格日成立

THE GRAY GRASS

Gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་ཤྭ་རྩིན་ལས། (Gerichengli 格日成立)*

A zigzagging brook flowed through a big valley shrouded in the morning fog. Black yak-hair and canvas tents were pitched along the banks of a creek. Herdswomen, their heads wrapped in red scarves, milked yaks and collected fresh dung in their family's yak enclosures. Yaks and horses loomed through the thick fog, grazing near the tents and each side of the creek. Dogs barked when a boy, Don grub, sang as he drove his family's yaks from a hill toward his family tent.

Inside a small canvas tent pitched next to a black yak-hair tent, forty-three-year-old Bdud 'dul raised his upper body from the bed and lit a cigarette with a cheap lighter. Once it was lit and glowing, he inhaled deeply while gazing at the lower part of the tent flapping in a gentle breeze. Motionless, he was entirely engrossed in thought.

"That boy would be alive if I hadn't visited my cousin on the way to the township town. I was a little bit late! I couldn't save his life. Why did he end his life that way? Stupid! Jumping off the Yellow River Bridge! I should have shouted and stopped him from doing such a fucking stupid thing. I didn't get near enough to grab him. I'm sure he could hear me clearly if I had shouted at the end of the bridge as he jumped from the middle. Why didn't I shout at him? I'm fucking dumb. How pathetic. Nothing is more precious than life."

He stubbed out the butt of his exhausted cigarette once it burned his fingers, listlessly remaining in bed, staring through the tent door. Sadness and depression registered on his round, deeply tanned face. But then he stood, pulled on his robe, and squirmed into his shoes, thinking, "I'll never have another chance to save a human life that can atone for the sin of killing a person."

He sighed as he exited the tent and walked toward the black yak hair tent where his twelve-year-old son, Don grub, joined his

* Gu ru 'phrin las. 2023. The Gray Grass. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:354-369.

parents for breakfast after driving the family's yaks to a small valley. Lha mo, three years younger than her husband, Bdud 'dul, glanced at him as he sat beside their boy. She read the sadness in his gaunt face and said, "Don't wear a face of misery. Our son and I want to see your happy face every morning!"

A faint smile crept onto Bdud 'dul's face as Don grub smiled at him. Looking at his son's reddish cheeks, he was reminded of a friend who had often visited his family with his friends, chatting cheerfully for hours. Bdud 'dul thought, "I was cheerful and humorous before imprisonment. People liked to visit my family and chat. I've been withdrawn and unhappy since returning from prison. Maybe that's why my family has few visitors."

Lha mo looked at Bdud 'dul's tangled, dirty shoulder-length hair and said, "You haven't washed your face and hair for weeks. Why don't you wash your hair to refresh yourself."

Bdud 'dul sipped his tea and murmured, "I'll wash my hair after breakfast," without looking at Lha mo.

"Seems you didn't sleep well last night again."

"I dreamed of the boy. Why did he end his life that way?"

"He lived with his uncle's family and herded their yaks after his mother died. His uncle beat him every time wolves killed a yak."

"Young people lack the courage to face life," Bdud 'dul said and, looking at his son, added, "Be kind to others. Cruelty ruins your life and leads to regret."

Bdud 'dul lit a butter lamp on a small wooden table in front of aligned religious figures, reciting mantras, intoning, "All living beings can avoid suffering and enjoy happiness." He'd learned this from his mother. She had often asked him to light butter lamps every morning and night after his father, a famous hunter, had died from a heart attack. His father killed and butchered deer and brought the meat home to feed his family. He also trapped wolves and foxes and sold the skins to buy food and clothes for his family. His mother believed lighting butter lamps could reduce her dead husband's sin. She beat her son once she discovered he forgot to

light butter lamps in the morning. His mother died when he turned fifteen, eight years after his father's death.

Bdud 'dul sat cross-legged, chanting scriptures and spinning a prayer wheel next to his son, who was stretched out on a mat writing homework. He was in grade four and concerned his Tibetan teacher would beat him if he didn't finish his homework before he returned to school after the summer vacation. He remembered that his teacher beat a student who didn't finish his Tibetan assignment for the last winter vacation. The teacher asked four male students to grab the student, and then he beat his butt with a wooden stool leg. The student couldn't sit the following day.

Lha mo was fixing lunch, tossing pieces of yak meat into a pot on the stove. Smoke and an acrid smell wafted out of the pot as the meat fried in the hot oil, causing Lha mo to cough. Don grub raised his head, glancing from his notebook to the pot. Looking at him, his mother said, "Quickly finish your homework. Lunch is about ready."

Don grub swallowed and declared, "I can't write an essay."

"What's the topic?" his mother asked.

"The love between father and son."

His mother stirred the meat, added potato chunks, and suggested, "If I were you, I could write that essay in a few minutes."

As Don grub snickered, Bdud 'dul stared at his son and thought, "It's hard for him to write such an essay. He didn't get much love from me. I was imprisoned when he was four and released only a year ago. He spent most of his time at school in the year I was back from prison."

He asked his son, "Is writing about you and your mother's love, OK?"

A big smile spread across Don grub's face. "Yeah, good idea. The teacher said to write about parents and their children's love," and he rushed out of the tent to pee just as his mother asked, "Do you want rice?"

A few minutes later, he raced into the tent, sat beside his mother, and said, "No rice for me."

His oily, crumpled books and notebooks were scattered beside a mat on the ground.

Normally, Don grub drove the family's yaks back home, but since his son was busy writing his homework, Bdud 'dul walked toward his family's yaks at the bottom of the valley. Bdud 'dul's cousin, Nyi ma, and a neighbor were riding yaks toward their families' yaks in an adjoining valley. When they saw Bdud 'dul, the neighbor commented, "How compassionate! I rarely see him riding yaks and horses to herd. By walking, he's accumulating merit and mitigating his sins."

Nyi ma returned, "No, he's worried his family's riding yaks will die if he rides them."

"No need for concern since his family is the richest in our community. He's got many riding yaks."

"His family and mine have the same number of yaks. My family has more horses than his."

The neighbor nodded and didn't want to argue with Nyi ma. The neighbor annoyed Nyi ma each time they debated which family was the richest in their community.

They sang and chatted as they disappeared into the valley.

Bdud 'dul tossed and turned in bed. Lha mo turned on a flashlight when he started heavily sweating and looked at her wristwatch. It was three AM. She looked at her husband and noticed beads of sweat coursing down his cheeks. She wiped the precipitation from his head with her palm and said, "You need to see a doctor. Each time I told you to see a doctor, you said, 'I'm fine. Don't need to see a doctor.'"

Bdud 'dul took a long breath and turned over to avoid the light in his eyes. Turning off the flashlight, his wife slid it under her pillow and asked, "Dreamed about the boy again?"

"Not this time. Dreamed of the person I ..." his words petered out.

Don grub drove his family's yaks to a mountain after breakfast and promised to herd them the whole day without coming home for lunch. Pouring lukewarm water into a basin, Lha mo set it next to Bdud 'dul, handed him a towel, looked at his dirty, oily hair, and ordered, "Wash your hair. I asked you to wash your hair yesterday, but you didn't. I'll ask Nyi ma to help you to see a doctor."

Bdud 'dul threw the towel into the basin and said, "Don't bother him. He needs to herd his family's yaks."

Lha mo left the tent without replying, but before he had finished washing his hair and face, she returned with Nyi ma. Nyi ma's family lived only a few minutes away. Lha mo offered Nyi ma a bowl of tea. In the meantime, Bdud 'dul combed his hair and struggled with the tangles between the comb's teeth due to not washing his hair for weeks. Sipping tea, Nyi ma looked at Bdud 'dul, commenting, "You're thinner. Not sleeping well at night and appetite loss must be from a serious illness. Lha mo is right. You must see a doctor."

Lha mo brought a clean robe and shirt from the canvas tent, handed them to Bdud 'dul, and said, "Put these on. Your robe and shirt are dirty."

Bdud 'dul plopped the clothes on a mat and asked, "Where's the motorcycle key?"

Lha mo said, "It must be under our pillow," and left the tent.

Bdud 'dul followed her without putting on the clean robe and shirt. Nyi ma came out after him. The motorcycle was parked near the black yak hair tent's entrance. Nyi ma asked, "Who's going to drive?"

"You do it. You drive better than me."

Lha mo handed the key to Nyi ma, who started the motorcycle. Bdud 'dul got behind him as Lha mo stared at her husband, "What a strange man! Likes to wear dirty clothes."

Bdud 'dul said nothing, and they drove away.

Bdud 'dul sat listlessly near the window in the doctor's office, staring at a mother holding her three or four-year-old son on her

lap near the stove in the middle of the office. Tears trickled down his cheeks as the little boy cried from the headache pain caused by a high fever. Then Bdud 'dul's refocused on the doctor and Nyi ma chatting outside.

Nyi ma described the situation, "He's ill-tempered, has no appetite, has nightmares, and can't sleep well at night. He didn't have...." He paused, embarrassed to report what Lha mo had told him on the way from his home to Bdud 'dul's home a short time ago. But finally, he said, "His wife told me that his sexual desire is decreasing, and they hadn't had sex for days."

The doctor nodded, seemingly knowing exactly what medicine would cure his illness. They then entered the medicine storeroom next to the doctor's office and took some boxes of pills. Returning to the office, the doctor gave the boxes of pills to Bdud 'dul and explained the prescription. The doctor took the money from Bdud 'dul, reassuring him, "Don't worry. Take those pills and try to feel better when you are unhappy."

Bdud 'dul and his cousin thanked the doctor and left.

On the way home, they stopped to sit near a small river. As Nyi ma untied his sash, bottles of Cola fell out, rolling onto the ground. He spread his robe on the ground, took off his shoes, and sprawled out. He opened a bottle of Cola, slugged half of it down, belched, and then threw the bottle to Bdud 'dul, who was also lying on the ground. Bdud 'dul raised his upper body and opened the bottle. Fluid spurted out and trickled from the bottle, opening over his hand and onto the ground. Wiping the liquid from his hand on his robe, he sipped the Cola before lighting a cigarette. He inhaled heavily without exhaling any smoke from his nose. Later, having washed his feet in the river, Nyi ma covered his neck with his scarf declaring, "What a hot day! The sun scorched my neck."

Inhaling the fragrance of the various, colorful flowers as a breeze wafted toward him, Bdud 'dul took another sip of Cola, agreeing, "The weather's very hot. No rain for days."

Nyi ma picked up a blade of green grass, "Scary! It has turned red in some places where the grass is exposed to intense

sunshine."

"Right. Was that boy wearing sunglasses we met near the clinic yard gate Do do's son?"

"Yeah."

Bdud 'dul sighed and said, "Miserable boy! I feel sorry for him. I don't know how I can help him."

Startled, Nyi ma stared at Bdud 'dul with wide-open eyes, "If you're compassionate, you shouldn't have killed his father."

Bdud 'dul said, "Destiny determines everything," as they continued their trip.

Bdud 'dul ate a bowl of rice with beef and cabbage for supper while his son had four bowls. Their bowls were the same size. When Lha mo urged him to have more, he said, "I'm full."

She worried he would lose more weight and become more ill. He then took two pills and went to bed. The couple slept in the canvas tent where they could easily protect their family's calves from wolf attack. Don grub slept in the black yak hair tent.

Lha mo got in bed with her husband, turned off her flashlight, slid it under their pillow, and then lay her head on it. Bdud 'dul turned to her and confided, "I saw Do do's son wearing a discolored, worn robe and a pair of sunglasses. He was with his friends and didn't see me. Should I find a way to help him? His family's poor."

Lha mo asked in surprise, "What? Aren't you afraid he'll avenge his father's death?"

"He's living with his grandmother. His parents divorced, and his father decided to raise his only child. Later, the boy lost his father."

"Others will think you are afraid of your enemies if you help him and his grandmother. It'll hurt your reputation as well as our son's."

Bdud 'dul didn't know how to respond and said nothing. Lha mo put a leg on his legs and moved beside him, stroking his chest and kissing his cheek and lips. She stopped and turned away when

Bdud 'dul showed no interest.

He dozed off after two hours of troubled thoughts and dreamed of Do do:

After bearded, fat Do do, smashed his fist into his face, Bdud 'dul tasted blood as it gushed from his nose. Groping in his robe pouch, Bdud 'dul pulled out a knife, unsheathed it and gripped it just as Do do jumped on top of him, sending him sprawling to the ground. In the process, Do do landed on the upright knife, sending it deep into his belly. Do do's progressively weaker attempts to stand continued as blood puddled around him. Bdud 'dul sheathed his bloody knife, fled, and was walking across a bridge when a boy wearing sunglasses stopped him, aimed a pistol at him, and fired.

Bdud 'dul woke in terror and turned to his snoring wife but didn't wake her. He couldn't sleep for hours.

...

Lha mo washed her hair in a stream near their family's tent as Bdud 'dul put his son's outgrown clothes in a bag and added a plastic bag with pieces of dried yak meat to a sack half-full of rice. He slung the sack over one shoulder and walked toward his impoverished neighbor's family, which included a seven-year-old boy, a nine-year-old girl, and his wife.

Lha mo later scolded, "Giving old clothes would make her unhappy. Poor people don't wear others' old clothes today."

"She was happy and thanked me."

He remembered what his mother had said and repeated, "The best way to accumulate merit is feeding, clothing, and housing poor people and making them happy."

...

Bdud 'dul had given his poor neighbor the last of his family's rice, so he left home to buy food for his family the following day. He refused to put on the clean robe and shirt Lha mo suggested before leaving. He slowed the motorcycle when he noticed a small white tent pitched near the road. Upon hearing the motorcycle, a monk emerged from the tent and sat cross-legged on the ground. Bdud'

dul parked his motorcycle on the roadside, got off, and sat beside the monk who wore a string of big sandalwood prayer beads around his neck. He placed his hands in his lap and continued piously chanting, ignoring Bdud 'dul, who guessed the monk was a great tantric practitioner as he wore a dirty, tattered cassock, had long, dirty hair haphazardly wrapped around his head, and had an unkempt mustache under his big blunt nose.

When Bdud 'dul knelt, the monk opened his big eyes, looked at Bdud 'dul, and said, "Poor living beings. Every living being in the universe suffers."

Bdud 'dul put his palms together, held them to his chest, bowed to the monk, thinking, "How true!" and motionlessly waited to hear more.

...

Lha mo offered a bowl of tea to Nyi ma, who had come to inquire about Bdud 'dul's health.

"The weather's extremely hot, so you must be thirsty. Drink some tea," encouraged Lha mo.

Nyi ma gazed into her beautiful eyes, "I'm not thirsty," then hesitated and added, "Are you thirsty?"

"I had a bowl of tea just before you came."

"I can quench your thirst if you're thirsty."

Lha mo giggled, went outside, looked around the tent, didn't see anyone nearby, and reentered the tent.

...

A small bald man with little eyes played pool in a glass-enclosed room with his tall friend. The bald man lit a cigarette, looked outside, and noticed a short man with a sack of rice on his back that seemed so heavy it would push his head to the ground. Realizing it was Bdud 'dul, he commented, "Man-killer! Killing a person is the most sinful thing."

His friend looked and said, "He didn't deliberately kill his friend. They were both drunk. Bdud 'dul called Do do Big Nose, so Do do punched and fell on him, sending the knife Bdud 'dul held into his gut."

This made him recall teasing Do do, calling him Big Nose among their friends. That irritated Do, who thought he was the best-looking local man. He hated being called Big Nose.

The bald man said, "It doesn't matter if he killed his friend accidentally. What matters is he killed his friend. That's sinful."

"He felt guilty and regretted killing his friend."

"I broke many girls' hearts when I broke up with them. Later, I felt guilty and regretted breaking their hearts. But feeling guilty and regretting what I had done didn't make any difference. Those girls were still in great pain."

His friend broke into laughter and said, "Don't boast. I know you had one girlfriend who later became your wife."

The bald man felt uncomfortable, smiled, and continued the game of pool.

Bdud 'dul's face showed great sadness, and it seemed his illness worsened daily. When Lha mo asked what was bothering him, he took two pills, replied, "I'm fine," and went to bed without supper. His unhappiness made his wife and son unhappy. They also lacked the appetite to have dinner.

Bdud 'dul dreamed he was naked and lying on a stone altar, his head hanging over the side, facing the ground. Several monks and his relatives, including his cousin, stood and chanted scriptures a few meters from the altar. A monk holding a big axe stood near the altar. Vultures hovered in the blue sky, and some flew down near the people. They chased one another, flapping and stretching their wings, craning their necks, and looking over the altar. The monk raised the axe as the other monks chanted and blew conch shells. Bdud 'dul woke with sweat when the monk hit his back with the axe.

Nyi ma went to see a monk in the local monastery when Lha mo asked him to consult the monk about her husband's situation. Nyi ma sat beside the adobe house entrance to await the monk's return from teaching. An hour later, an old white-haired monk came. They entered the room and sat on dry yak skins near the stove. Nyi ma

told the monk about Bdud 'dul. The monk chanted a mantra and blew over a sifter he held in his palm, then touched it to his forehead and closed his eyes. He placed the sifter on his lap, read the number, and said, "No big problem. Evils do not possess him. He's unhappy and depressed because he's paying the price for his actions."

Bdud 'dul's family and Nyi ma were glad that Bdud 'dul wasn't tortured by ghosts.

...

It was September. Don grub returned to school, and his mother herded their family's yaks. Bdud 'dul rested in the shade of his family's tent near the entrance, reciting scripture and spinning a prayer wheel. He looked at the high mountains. Suddenly, the grass on the mountain turned from gray to green. His heart pounded at that sudden transition. He put down his prayer wheel and rubbed his eyes. He blinked several times, opening his eyes wide to look at the mountains, and realized the grass was indeed green. When he felt calm after his fantasy, he was confused to discover the prayer wheel on the ground. "How did I throw it on the ground?" he wondered and later imagined how it happened.

...

Bdud 'dul saw Nyi ma's wife, Mtsho mo, walk toward his family as his family's watchdog barked. He invited Mtsho mo into the tent and offered tea. She was tortured by a falling out with Nyi ma, suspecting he was having sex with Lha mo. She didn't tell Bdud 'dul who Nyi ma was seeing, but he knew. She sobbed, and tears trickled down her cheeks like raindrops. Bdud 'dul consoled, "Forget it. Be a tolerant wife."

"I love him so much. I can't allow him to love another woman," she protested.

"I'm sure he loves you too. Forget it."

"You know I can't have children. Nyi ma wants to marry his lover and have children."

"Don't think too much. Forgive him if you don't want to divorce him. Forgiving him will mend the conflict."

Bdud 'dul took a deep breath to calm himself. When Nyi ma

visited him in prison, he asked Nyi ma to care for Lha mo and Don grub. He was sure Nyi ma was caring for his wife as he asked, which had built a relationship between Nyi ma and Lha mo. He added, "It's not your fault. It's not Nyi ma's fault. It's my fault. I messed up everything."

Mtsho mo didn't pay much attention and continued sobbing, eventually returning home with a swollen face and hoarse voice.

...

Skya lu, in his early sixties, was the poorest and laziest man in their village. His wife and daughter were also lazy. He visited Bdud 'dul and spent the night at his home. Skya lu often rested at home and would say, "My life is predoomed to be poor. No matter how hard I work, I can't become rich since the fortuneteller predicted my life." His relatives and neighbors frequently urged and encouraged him to herd his family's yaks well after wolves once killed some of his family's yaks.

Skya lu repeatedly told Bdud 'dul, "You're the best man I know. You often help my family. We are grateful. I'll never forget your kindness."

Bdud 'dul loaned money to Skya lu when his son or daughter got sick and needed medicine and sometimes gave money to Skya lu to purchase food and clothes for his family.

As they chatted, Bdud 'dul looked at Skya lu's faded robe and shirt and encouraged him to drink more tea. Bdud 'dul recalled Skya lu's story:

When I was younger, a fortuneteller came to my place and predicted I would be poor because he saw only a few barley grains in the bottom of a leather bag when he divined for me.

Bdud 'dul was scared when he thought about the fortuneteller. He interjected and asked, "When will grass turn green to gray?"

"Late September, early October," replied Skya lu.

Suddenly, Bdud 'dul began thinking about the fortuneteller and what he had said to him. Skya lu continued talking, but when

he asked a question, Bdud 'dul was so disengaged Skya lu had to repeat his question.

On Saturday, locals came to town to pick up their children from the local boarding school and take them home for the weekend. As Bdud 'dul and his son walked near the police station, they saw a crowd gathered at the police station entrance, where two policemen were escorting a man with long hair and shackled hands inside. A young policeman holding a monk's cassock and a yellow bag followed them. No one from the crowd knew the detainee and assumed he was an outsider. As the crowd speculated the man's crime, Bdud 'dul craned his neck, clearly seeing the man's face as he entered the yard. Bdud 'dul thought, "He looks like the tantric practitioner I met a few weeks ago!" but then told himself, "Impossible!"

Suddenly, a teenage boy wearing sunglasses spat in Bdud 'dul's face and grasped the handle of a long knife inside his sash. It took a second for Bdud 'dul to recognize it was Do do's son. Bdud 'dul grabbed his son's hand, and they walked quickly away. The boy spat at them and snarled, "Fucker!" as his friends seized him and urged him not to throw a rock at Bdud 'dul.

The police leader slumped into an armchair beside a policewoman sitting at a table, taking notes on what the accused was saying. The police leader said, "You told a couple with three daughters to give you a yak, and you would help them have a son. Is that true?"

The man thought then replied, "I could chant scripture and help them have a child. That's what I said. I didn't say the child would be a son or daughter."

The policeman shouted, "Liar! You may cheat others, but that doesn't mean you're smart enough to deceive me. They gave you a yak because you promised the wife would give birth to a son. Right? But then she gave birth to another daughter. Not a son."

"I told them the wife would give birth to a child. I didn't promise they would have a son."

"Where's the yak you took from them?"

"I sold it."

The policeman hit the table with his fist, stood up, and said, "Bullshit! Fake monk. Shame on you."

I'm not a fake monk. I'm a real monk."

"Why aren't you wearing your monk robe if you're a real monk?"

"When I tried to jump across a stream this morning, I fell in the water, and my clothes got wet. I was cold and went to a home. The family didn't have monk robes, so the man of the family gave me some of his clothes, and I put them on."

The policeman chuckled and said, "Don't play smart with me! Tell the truth. It's good for you."

The man said, "I dare not lie to anyone. If I lie to you, it means I violated my religious vow. Breaking a religious vow is an unatoneable sin."

The policeman and his colleague shook their heads in disbelief.

...

When Bdud 'dul was about to go to bed without dinner, Don grub looked at his father's gaunt face, clutched his leg, and begged him to eat. Bdud 'dul sat back on the ground. Don grub knelt behind him, embraced him, and kissed his cheek. Bdud 'dul patted his son's head, kissing his forehead as his son smiled.

Lha mo sat beside her husband, looked at him a bit later, and accused, "Coward! You should have beaten him. I will fight back if a man spits in my face. How shameful! He spat in your face and called you 'bastard,' and you walked away. Others say you were afraid of him."

Bdud 'dul silently thought, "Of course, he hates me and wants to kill me. If someone killed my father, I would try to kill them. I must endure whatever the boy does to me. I won't hurt him and bring more suffering to his grandmother."

But then he thought, "Maybe Lha mo is right. Maybe I should beat him and teach him a lesson, or he'll think I'm afraid of

him. People bully you when you do nothing. No, no! I won't make another mistake and won't hurt that boy and his grandmother again."

After a bowl of noodles for dinner, he kissed his son's forehead and asked him to go to bed.

...

The snow-clad village in October was a time and place when distant birds were the only living beings making noise. Bdud 'dul motionlessly stood near the tent entrance, gazing at the snowcapped mountains. A shudder of fear passed through him as he thought, "Death is coming for me."

While Lha mo was outside milking yaks, he entered the canvas tent, stood on a small stool, and hung a rope with a noose from a roof pole.

Don grub told his mother about a teacher beating a student with a stick because he hadn't finished his homework. Unable to bear the pain, the boy had run from one classroom corner to another. His son's joyful laughter reminded him of his childhood and how much he had admired neighbors' children who happily sat on horses behind their fathers. Recalling that children with parents are the happiest and luckiest, Bdud 'dul removed the noose from his neck.

Bright sunshine melted the snow in an hour. The green grass was now gray.

After escorting Don grub to school, Bdud 'dul headed home. A man hailed him on the Yellow River Bridge for a ride. At first, Bdud 'dul didn't recognize him but soon realized it was the man he had met two months earlier. The man's hair was now short and wore a black fabric robe. Disembarking from his motorcycle Bdud 'dul unsheathed his knife as the man approached and then stabbed the man's belly. The man's face turned pale as blood spurted out of his mouth. Bdud 'dul stabbed him several times until he toppled to the ground as blood pooled on the bridge. Bdud 'dul spat in the man's face declaring, "You are now dying when the grass is gray."

Two police cars and an ambulance screamed toward the

bridge with shrieking sirens, shocking everyone. People scrambled out of restaurants and shops, gathering in the town center, talking to one another, and wondering what had happened.

Bdud 'dul leaned against a bridge barrier, still holding his knife, blood slowly dripping from the crimson blade. Some bystanders stood near the bleeding man, but no one dared approach Bdud 'dul.

Having arrived quickly, the police chief got out of his car and pointed his pistol at Bdud 'dul, who flung his knife into the river. Some policemen helped two doctors carry the pale-faced victim to the ambulance. Bdud 'dul confessed, "I stabbed him," and didn't resist as the police cuffed his wrists.

The next day, Lha mo and Nyi ma were in the police station yard with the police chief, who explained, "The victim was a fake monk. He met your husband two months ago and told him, 'You will die when the grass turns gray.' Your husband believed that and was very depressed as a result. You know how miserable Bdud 'dul has been recently."

Better understanding what Bhud 'dul had suffered, Lha mo's gaze shifted from the police chief to the mountains encircling the town. Her eyes filled with tears as she realized the grass had turned completely gray.

TIBETAN TERMS

bdud 'dul བདུད་འདུལ།

do do ཏོ་ཏོ།

don grub རོན་གུབ།

gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

lha mo ལྷ་མོ།

mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།

nyi ma ཉི་མ།

skya lu སྐུ་ལ།

CHINESE TERM

Gerichengli 格日成立

FEMALE DILEMMA

Rdo rje dpal 'byor རྡོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་པོ་ཡོད། (Duoji huanjiao 多吉环角)*

The early morning was tranquil and undisturbed, except for cricket chirps in the distant barley, wheat, and canola fields. A dawn chorus began as sunrise chiseled at the night's darkness. Early birds perched on courtyard walls and poplar, willow, juniper, and apricot tree branches. Their twittering was more audible in the morning because the raucous thump-thump of hand tractors, honking of cars searching for people looking for a ride to the township town, mooing cows waiting to be milked, and crowing roosters had yet to begin.

As usual, Mtsho skyid woke up at six on her adobe bed heated by the stove that channeled heat through the bed, warming it. The stove was also used for cooking. Mtsho skyid's bed companions were her six-year-old daughter, Klu mo - nicknamed Klu b+he - and her loudly snoring husband, Dbang chen. Klu b+he slept peacefully in the warm sheepskin robe her grandmother had made. After securing her pink head scarf, Mtsho skyid donned a robe made from black synthetic sheep skin and tightly cinched a red sash around her waist. Extending her hands, she rolled up her sleeves to do chores more comfortably.

An old-fashioned, grimy wooden cupboard ornamented with carved flower-like patterns stood against the wall facing the door. The upper shelves displayed well-organized rows of bowls patterned with dragons and the Eight Auspicious Symbols.¹ The central cupboard had four flower-decorated enameled steel kettles and a wooden case with a sliding top containing roasted barley flour and bits of dried cheese. Screwdrivers, nails, and pliers were stored

* Rdo rje dpal 'byor. 2023. Female Dilemma. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:370-383.

¹ The Eight Auspicious Symbols are the parasol, golden fish, treasure vase, lotus, right-turning white conch, victory banner, the Dharma wheel, and the eternal knot.

in a row of drawers at the bottom.

Every morning, Mtsho skyid polished the cupboard with a small piece of sheep fat and a cloth until it gleamed.

She scooped ash from the adobe stove into a rusty metal container, carried it to the outhouse, and emptied it. Next, she filled the now-empty container with dry cow, sheep, and goat dung and carried it to a storeroom. Heading to a corner of the fenced orchard in the family courtyard, she put chopped firewood in the front fold of her robe and carried it back to the house, where she put the firewood and dung into the stove. She lit a bunch of straw to start the fire while chanting *Skyabs 'gro*¹ non-stop.

Buddhist scriptures with yellowish covers were arranged in order on the shelves in the shrine room. Mtsho skyid and Dbang chen leafed through them at least once a year. Sometimes two or three relatives helped turn the pages of each scripture on the day of a religious festival, usually after the Tibetan New Year. Images of Tara² and Ao rgyan rin po che³ hung on the walls. Having offered water in seven medium-sized copper receptacles on a table in front of the shelves to the Buddhist images and scriptures, and after lighting a butter lamp, Mtsho skyid prostrated seven times. With her palms together, she prayed for her family's well-being, peaceful and harmonious relations between people, and protection from accidents and disasters.

Holding a wooden bucket, she walked to the pen where cows and calves were tied to poles some distance apart and drove two Holsteins, a black cow, and a white-spotted brown cow from the pen that shielded the cattle from the rain and chilly air to an open-air enclosure. She picked up a frayed rope from the ground, hobbled one of the Holstein's back legs, and began milking. As she squeezed

¹ *Skyabs 'gro* or *Skyabs su 'gro ba* 'Taking Refuge' to accept the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha) as refuge and decisively commit to free your and others' suffering in samsara (<https://bit.ly/3DfwCzv> October 2022).

² Sphyan ras gzigs, Avalokitesvara.

³ Padmasambhava 'Born from a Lotus'.

the smooth teats, milk spurted and splashed against the bucket. After what she deemed a proper milking time, she untied the hobbles and the cow's three-month-old calf from the pole. The calf jumped crazily, rushed to its mother, and vigorously butted her udder. The energetic nursing seemed to pain its mother, but she suffered placidly, periodically swishing her tail and turning to look at and lick her calf.

After milking three cows, sunlight illuminated the earth, heralding a splendid, sunny spring day. Smoke coiled up from the chimney of every household. "How fast time passes," Mtsho skyid thought and hurried to finish other chores.

She had difficulty adapting to the farming workload when she first came to her husband's home in the autumn. The family had twenty *mu*¹ of barley and thirty *mu* of canola. All the farm work was done by hand, and there was no escape, even late in her pregnancy. Her husband was frequently absent, wandering and drinking with his friends. During the harvest season, she needed to assist other families in a web of reciprocal labor relationships.

She now had some leisure time and felt less anxious.

She had dreamed of falling from a cliff the night before, which filled her with foreboding. A *sgrol*, a neighbor's thirty-year-old daughter, suffered from ovarian cancer. Several years earlier, a *sgrol* had gone to a distant pastoral area to collect caterpillar fungus, had formed a relationship with a local man, and brought him home. Locals gossiped that he was homeless. The couple lived together but held no wedding and soon left. Her parents said they had gone to do construction work.

A *sgrol* was very ill when they returned after several years with no children. Once plump and dynamic, she was a barely recognizable pale, skeletal figure. Her family invited monks to chant scriptures to heal her. When there was no improvement, her family

¹ One *mu* = 0.067 hectares.

took her to a hospital, where she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The doctor suggested chemotherapy. A sgrol's father, Khon rgyal, asked a *bla ma* for a divination. The *bla ma* said this was not ideal. Time passed, and eventually, they accepted the doctor's recommendation. A sgrol lost all her hair during chemotherapy treatments,

Now, a year later, her condition had steadily worsened. Dpa mtsho, A sgrol's mother, understood her daughter could not be cured and desperately wept from time to time. Eventually, A sgrol needed help eating and with toileting.

A sgrol's husband had escorted her home after those years of absence, then left and not returned. He had said he would return soon after visiting his parents, but it was a lie. Later, A sgrol's parents tried unsuccessfully to contact him. Her mother blamed and cursed him for her daughter's condition.

Mtsho skyid occasionally sent some milk to A sgrol's household.

Dpa mtsho desperately declared, "Now, bones are all that remains of my daughter. We should have followed the *bla ma*'s initial advice and never done chemotherapy. That's why her condition worsened."

...

Mtsho skyid and some fellow women weeded in the field and gossiped about anything new in the community.

"What a pity! A sgrol got a horrible disease that can never be cured," said one woman with a pink headscarf.

"It's the consequence of the misconduct of her grandfather, who once burnt religious scriptures during the chaos years ago," said another.

"Also, her husband abandoned her. What a pathetic woman!"

Mtsho skyid remained silent.

...

After milking six cows, Mtsho skyid put the full milk bucket in a higher and safer place so the calves would not knock it over. She

then drove two steers out of the pen and collected dung amid the odor of manure familiar from the day of her birth. She picked up a willow branch basket from a corner of the pen and slung it on her back. She picked up very moist manure piles and tossed them into the basket. When it was full, she carried it to the foot of an earthen wall that also functioned as the house's outer yard. She made four such trips. Next, she used her hands to shape and flexibly press the moist manure into thin, flat patties and stuck them on the adobe wall. She would pull them off and store them in the fuel room when they eventually dried.

After completing all her duties in the animal pen, she carried the full bucket of milk to the room that stored milk, cheese, and butter, as well as sacks of wheat, barley, and canola. She carefully opened the door to keep the cat inside. The cat prevented mice from eating the grain. She poured milk into a giant stainless-steel cylindrical vessel, then took the wooden bucket with a bit of milk back to the house. Her husband sat cross-legged by the adobe stove on a rectangular black and white striped rug woven from sheep wool and yak hair, fingering his prayer beads and chanting *Skybs 'gro*. Klu b+he scampered around the house murmuring and holding a doll Mtsho skyid had acquired by trading five months of hair from her brush with a vendor.

Mtsho skyid washed her dung-encrusted hands in a stainless-steel basin on a washstand outside the house. Her fingertips were cracked from daily chores.

Inside, water rapidly boiled in the pot on the adobe stove over a fiercely burning firewood-dung fire that occasionally sent out bursts of flame.

Mtsho skyid shredded some tea leaves from a tea brick and tossed them into the pot with water and milk to make milk tea. Next, she scooped up some smoldering cow dung and placed the dung on the altar in front of the house. She added two full spoons of barley flour mixed with juniper needles and sugar, then sprinkled water on it. With a small copper ladle, she flung water to the sky while beseeching the deities to protect her family from evil and

misfortune.

Returning, she put *rtsam pa*¹ in Dbang chen's ceramic bowl and hers. She added dried cheese from the wooden case, butter, and milk tea, then offered her husband his bowl with both hands. She helped her daughter mix *rtsam pa*, butter, and sugar in a small wooden bowl. Mtsho skyid put a plate of steamed buns on the ground, sat on a small rug at the foot of the stove, and sipped milk tea. Her daughter sat by her father, breaking the silence by counting bits of tea that floated in the tea and joyfully announcing, "Three guests will come today."

"Don't sit cross-legged. That's how boys sit," chided Mtsho skyid.

Klu b+he reluctantly sat like her mother, kneeling on both knees, though sitting cross-legged was more comfortable.

Klu b+he was six and hadn't started school. Locals believed it was better to send children to school when they were around nine or ten years old as they were more likely to understand, learn more, and be better able to avoid bullying from other students.

As Mtsho skyid thought about Klu b+he and school, she recalled her time there.

Before Mtsho skyid began school, she imagined it as a wonderful place where she would play with other children. She envied her cousin, Rdo rje, when he described how much fun he had with other children playing hide and seek, running competitions, etc. However, she found a very different reality.

Walking to school early in the morning was a nightmare, especially in winter. She left home in darkness, full of terrifying possibilities. The school was about three kilometers from her house, so it was a long walk. Every morning, she woke up full of fear and worried that she would be late again for school.

Moonlight illuminated her dark silent path. The five-year-old family watchdog began barking when she clanged open the

¹ Roasted barley flour.

metal gate but calmed after recognizing her. She trembled as the cold penetrated her thick clothes and wrapped her orange-red scarf around her head, exposing only her eyes. The stars sparkled in the sky. She searched for the Big Dipper as she walked along the rough, unpaved path and noticed a meteor streak across the sky and vanish, meaning someone would die. She was sorry she had seen it and chanted *ma Ni*¹ as her grandmother had instructed in such situations.

"Where did the meteor go?" she wondered.

Halfway to school, she suddenly noticed a dark manlike shape in the distance. Her heart raced. Hardly able to breathe, her steps slowed. The 'thing' was near the path. She looked around but saw nothing out of the ordinary. She took a few more steps and waited for a passerby to follow. As it grew lighter, a student approached. She followed. "Pitiful!" she thought as she saw that the 'thing' was a man wearing a black robe lying on the ground, his head covered with the robe. "Maybe he's drunk," she wondered.

She was late for school. Her head teacher scolded and further humiliated her by ordering her to stand in the center of the schoolyard for an hour. During the first-class break time, students came and surrounded her. Embarrassed, she stuck her chin to her chest, totally overwhelmed.

Younger classmates in her class were often maltreated. The monitor and his companions were tall bullies. If a child got a new notebook, pen, or snack, they snatched it and warned, "If any of you accuse us to the teacher or your family, you'll be very sorry!"

Math was the weakest subject for most students, including Mtsho skyid. The teacher wrote numbers on the blackboard in every math class while talking. Most students had no idea what he was teaching. Mtsho skyid appeared to concentrate, but fear forced her to stare intently at the blackboard until the class ended. After the math teacher assigned homework, she copied everything from

¹ The Avalokitesvara mantra: *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* – the Six Sacred Syllables.

others.

After every exam, the teacher furiously announced the students' scores, glaring at those who got very low scores. Next, he ordered the monitor to bring the skipping rope from his office. Students who didn't pass the exam had to roll up their pant legs and line up while the teacher whipped their calves with all his might. Some cried and trembled. The rope left red, swollen welts that transitioned from numbness to agonizing pain.

No student told their parents about such punishment or the other students' bullying. Like her peers, Mtsho skyid hid her bruises from her parents and kept quiet about her monitor's bullying, fearing more abuse.

She often wished to stop attending school. By coincidence, when she was in Grade Four, her father said schooling was useless and told her to stay home and help herd livestock, which was exactly what she wanted.

"You should grind some barley flour for the religious ritual," said Dbang chen.

A month earlier, Mtsho skyid had experienced pain in the joints of her feet. The *bla ma* said this was because she had dug soil near a spring, disturbing the water deity, so the family should chant and hold a ritual near the spring.

After a quick breakfast, Dbang chen drove their cattle along a narrow rocky road toward the family's grazing land, about an hour away. The grazing land of each household was fenced to avoid mixing with other families' livestock.

She was satisfied Dbang chen had settled down, stopped drinking, and helped her with family chores. Seemingly, he had learned from his earlier insane behavior and its consequences.

Some months before, Dbang chen drunkenly cursed Mtsho skyid without provocation other than general discomfort with life. She responded with a few words and suggested he sleep. He violently shoved over a wooden cupboard with glass sliders and drawers in

response. Glasses and bowls shattered everywhere. Broken shards covered the floor. Dbang chen grabbed her by the hair. Mtsho skyid pleaded with him to stop, afraid their sleeping daughter would be frightened, but he continued shouting curses and threats. Klu b+he woke, terrified at the sight of the broken glasses and bowls, overturned cabinets, and her father abusing her mother. She shrieked and cried loudly.

Mtsho skyid was fed up with her husband and felt insecure. She scooped up her daughter and strode out of the house with hatred in her heart, resolving never to live with that crazy man again. She pessimistically thought, "What evil did I do in my last life to merit this miserable life?"

She patted Klu b+he's head and comforted, "Don't be afraid, sweetheart. It will all soon be fine."

Klu b+he clutched her mother, confused about her parents' relationship.

They walked the two kilometers to Mtsho skyid's brother's house, where they spent the night. The following day, her brother drove them by motorcycle to the herding area where their parents lived.

Once there, Mtsho skyid tearfully described how her husband abused her. She stayed for a month, despite her mother's attempts to persuade her to return: "I'm so sorry about your situation, but this is a woman's destiny. A marriage is more important than anything else for a woman. Divorce shouldn't be your choice because others will denigrate you."

Some of Dbang chen's older relatives came asking her to return. Mtsho skyid's mother said they needed to return with Dbang chen, who must promise not to beat his wife and stop drinking.

After some weeks, the relatives returned with Dbang chen, who wrote and signed a statement that he would no longer drink and never again abuse Mtsho skyid. If he violated these promises, his relatives would be responsible. He further authenticated this pledge with fingerprints from his left hand.

Considering her mother's advice and thinking about Klu

b+he's future, Mtsho skyid reluctantly returned.

...

Mtsho skyid picked up the black ceramic container wrapped in a robe containing wheat flour that had fermented the night before on the warm adobe. She took it to the cutting board and poured the fermented dough into a plastic basin, leaving a piece of starter dough for the next fermentation. She sprinkled a bit of baking soda on the dough, added water and wheat flour, and divided the dough into two pieces. She mixed oil with one and added nothing to the second piece.

After kneading some of the dough, she cut a piece and made it into a thin round shape, using a cleaver to make linear patterns, and put it on a metal plate she held with one hand. Taking a towel and a scoop in the other hand, she walked outside, where she had prepared a pile of burnt sheep dung powder the night before. She brushed away hot ashes atop an aluminum pot she had buried the night before, put the dough inside the pot, picked up the pot cover with a cloth, and covered it with hot ash. At intervals of about ten minutes, she removed one loaf of baked bread and started baking another.

At the same time, taking an old wooden churn from the storeroom, she placed it under the shade of a tree in the yard and poured the three full containers of milk she had collected three days earlier. She then put the churning stick in the churn, closed the lid, and sealed the crevice with dough to prevent milk from leaking.

Folding the front part of the robe under the sash and rolling up her sleeves, she began churning the milk, counting the number of churns. She would bake bread later.

After two hours of churning, she opened the churn. Butter was at the top. She took a handful of butter from the churn, put it in a basin of cold water, and patted it into a ball.

Later, she boiled the buttermilk and filtered cheese through a netting bag fastened between two wooden poles.

She cut a piece of hot just-baked bread and smeared fresh butter on it for Klu b+he, playing alone in the garden. She hurried

toward her mother when she knew there was hot bread with butter - her favorite.

"Sister, are you at home?" called a man suddenly, approaching her house.

Wondering who it might be, Mtsho skyid immediately replied, "Yes, I'm here," and stepped outside.

The neighbor's son said, "My mother is asking for your help to cook. The *bla ma* will arrive soon."

"*Bla ma?*"

"Yes, my sister's condition is worse. She's eaten nothing in days and constantly moans in agony. She's in great pain. We can't bear to see her going through all this. Our relatives gathered and discussed a solution. We finally agreed to invite the *bla ma*."

"I'm so sorry! I'll come in a few minutes."

Worried and agitated, she hurriedly cleaned the churn and walked with her daughter to the neighbor's house. When they arrived, A sgrol's mother asked Mtsho skyid to make dumplings for the *bla ma*. Mtsho skyid went to the kitchen where Mkha' 'gro, the neighbor's daughter-in-law, was rolling out the dumpling wrappers.

They greeted each other.

"I'll be responsible for making the wrappers. Please wrap the filling since I can't make good-looking dumplings," Mkha' 'gro asserted.

"Sure, I'll wrap them," Mtsho skyid replied.

As she put a bit of minced meat in the center of each wrapper and expertly closed it, she thought how miserable A sgrol's mother must be. Mtsho skyid knew she would have gone crazy if anything like that happened to her daughter.

About an hour later, a red car arrived. Everyone went out to welcome the *bla ma*. The driver got out first and greeted them all, then assisted the *bla ma* in getting out of the car as everyone bowed to show respect. Khon rgya bowed, extended his hands with upturned palms in greeting, and escorted the *bla ma* into the house.

Plates of fruit and fried bread were arranged on the living room tables. The *bla ma* sat on a seat covered with yellow fabric

higher than others in the room. He was offered milk tea with butter in a yellow bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols. Mutton and dumplings would be offered later. Others sat on small stools and described A sgrol's situation. Khon rgya was in a gloomy mood. His heart must have been bleeding, but he tried to appear strong.

After they all agreed to chant '*Pho ba*,¹ the *bla ma* was led to where A sgrol lay. A barely breathing human skeleton, she no longer recognized anyone. The *bla ma* began with words that comforted at least the onlookers and began chanting. Others knelt and prayed with their palms together.

A sgrol had one brother and two sisters. All were married. The brother remained in his parents' home, while the two sisters had moved to their husbands' homes in other communities. The sisters visited their ill sister once, but their responsibility for their family chores, herding, and babysitting meant they could not stay long.

When the *bla ma* was leaving, the family offered 500RMB with a *kha tag*.² Everyone kowtowed, and the *bla ma* touched their heads with a string of prayer beads.

In a melancholy mood, Mtsho skyid clutched her daughter's hand and returned to her house late in the afternoon.

Before sunset, her husband drove the cattle back from the grazing land and, as usual, said nothing. He seemed unhappy, which was his normal mood. He lay on the bed to watch a TV program while Mtsho skyid chopped mutton on a small cutting board for dinner.

...

When Mtsho skyid learned the following day that A sgrol had passed away, she went to the house full of weeping to offer assistance. A sgrol's sisters arrived and mourned. Mtsho skyid tried

¹ "The transference or ejection of consciousness at the moment of death, a practice which may be performed for oneself or on behalf of ..."
<https://bit.ly/3eSl8sz> 20 October 2022.

² A strip of white scarf.

to console them, but it was not until an older woman urged, "Crying brings a lot of fear to the deceased in Bar do,¹ " that they ceased wailing.

Young women who were close relatives replaced their hair bands with white ones to show respect for the deceased, while the young men turned their hats inside out, with some attaching a white ribbon to the hats.

Locals visited the family one after another to offer condolences when they heard the news, offering tea bricks, butter, and money. Relatives and neighbors came to help with the cooking and religious rituals. Women busily cooked and served the visitors.

Dpa mtsho offered a huge *tsha gsur*² at the house's gate to prevent the deceased from experiencing hunger and alleviate her fear in Bar do. Seven monks from a local monastery came and chanted for seven days to lessen A sgrol's sins, to ensure she would have a good next life, be reborn as a human, and to prevent her from going to Hell.

Hundreds of butter lamps were made and lit in lines on a long, rectangular table. Some men tended the lamps, cleaned the depleted ones, and made new ones. Everyone held a string of prayer beads and ceaselessly chanted *ma Ni*.

A sgrol's sisters wailed plaintively when a new visitor or relative arrived. A sgrol's mother did not cry. Perhaps her tears had run out, or perhaps months ago, she had accepted her daughter's death.

People gathered to chant two days after A sgrol's death. An esteemed senior nun sat in the upper part of the room and started *ma Ni*-chanting in a melody reserved for particular rituals. Others followed in chorus, creating so much emotion that some wept uncontrollably.

¹ An intermediate state in the death-rebirth cycle where the soul resides between death and being reborn into the world (<https://bit.ly/3DI66z4> 29 October 2022).

² An offering of a mix of roasted barley flour, the three whites (milk, yogurt, butter), and the three sweets (sugar, molasses, honey).

Late that night, men took the corpse in a car to a sky burial¹ site according to the *bla ma*'s suggestion. Relatives chanted and offered butter lamps for seven days. Local women fasted together twice for the deceased. Mtsho skyid also participated, chanting 100,000 *ma Ni* and praying for A sgrol.

...

Human fragility was now so obvious Mtsho skyid resolved to chant more frequently and trust Buddha to provide protection and well-being in her current and future lives.

TIBETAN TERMS

'pho ba འཕོ་བ།
 a sgrol ཇམ་སྒྲུལ།
 Avalokiteśvara, spyan ras
 gzigs སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས།
 bar do བར་དོ།
 bla ma ལྷ་མ།
 dbang chen དབང་ཆེན།
 Dharma, chos ཆོས།
 dpa mtsho དཔའ་མཚོ།
 khon rgyal ཁོན་རྒྱལ།
 klu b+he ལུ་ཆེ།
 klu mo ལུ་མོ།
 ma Ni མ་ཤེ།

mkha' 'gro མཁའ་འགོ།
 mtsho skyid མཚོ་སྤྱིད།
 oM ma Ni pad+me hUM
 ཨོཾ་ཤེ་པ་རྟེ་ཏུ།
 Padmasambhava, ao rgyan
 rin po che མོ་རྒྱན་པེ་པ་ཆེ།
 rdo rje རྩོ་རྟེ།
 rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།
 Samsara, 'khor ba འཁོར་བ།
 Sangha, dge 'dun དགེ་འདུན།
 skyabs 'gro སྐྱབས་འགོ།
 skyabs su 'gro ba སྐྱབས་སུ་འགོ་བ།
 tsha gsur ཚ་གསུང།

CHINESE TERM

mu 厩

¹ A funeral practice involving placing a corpse on a mountain or outdoor structure to decompose or be eaten by scavenging animals (<https://bit.ly/3VMGRCN> 22 October 2022).

SO I WON'T FORGET

Chos skyong skyabs མོས་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་ལ། (Qiejiangjia 切江加)*

1

A chilly, windy, snowy midwinter day. You are in your blind maternal grandfather's bed in the corner of your family's black yak-hair tent. The lower part of the tent constantly trembles, buffeted by the strong winds, like a giant bird flapping its wings. An occasional puff of wind-driven snow circulates everywhere in the tent. Heavy snow covers the grassland. A thick haze has swallowed the upper part of the nearby mountains. Our sheep flock bleats as they move here and there, unable to get to the grass under the heavy snow. The wind howls, and the sky grows darker. It will probably soon snow again.

2

In the summer pasture. Twenty children swim in a pool created by a small dam on a creek near the local families. XX accidentally unleashes their dog. It mauls two children badly. You pull your little sister away from the danger. YY is enraged. Serial conflicts follow between the XX and YY families. Frequent fighting and scolding. The community is saturated in a stressful, unpleasant atmosphere.

3

Your Grade Three primary school math teacher. An unmarried, unhappy young woman with a cold face from an agricultural area kicks the door open 'bang' with her black high-heeled shoes. She rushes to the teacher's platform, bleating at the students in her goatish voice, constantly thumping the rostrum with a bamboo stick. Tshe ring's bleeding hands and calves, 1, 2, 3, ... 97, 98, 99, 100. Tears without end dribble down his cheeks. His hands become red, redder, numb, number, and bloody. He loses consciousness. The bamboo stick becomes warm. He didn't recite the multiplication table correctly, but that's not the reason for the beating.

* Chos skyong skyabs. 2023. So I Won't Forget. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:384-387.

4

Sgrol ma mtsho joins your Grade Six primary school class. Pale face, easy to communicate with, nice clean clothes. She sits in front of your desk and turns around to chat with you during break time. Tension grows - your thoughts of her muddle your mind. Shy, nervous near her outside the classroom, mesmerized by her actions, you pretend to ignore her.

5

Your uncle and his son buy a new car in the provincial capital and head home. Then a terrible accident not very far from their home. Their new white car folded, smashed, blood everywhere. Both are taken to a hospital. In beds. Heads covered with gauze, one broken jaw, two broken legs, a broken arm, and dangling IV bottles.

6

The local primary school. Autumn, your tent. Uncle S, who lives with his wife's family, rents grassland near us, so we are neighbors in Ldum lhas. Uncle S buys a heavy, very-used motorcycle that produces dark, smelly smoke clouds. How many yaks or sheep are exchanged for it? That tireless fascinating machine can carry two or three people into the distance. Stranger still, its two wheels are in a straight line, but it remains upright.

How you yearn for Uncle S to allow you and your cousins to ride behind him after he masters motorcycle driving. After about ten days of diligent practice, Uncle S is confident enough to do that.

In the morning, that noisy machine is just a big, heavy piece of metal that Uncle has to wake up by pouring several kettles of hot water on the engine before trying to start it. If that doesn't work, the next step is pushing the motorcycle up a slope, riding it down, and popping the clutch. We do this three or four times, eight or nine times on cold mornings, before the motorcycle coughs, sputters, and finally roars to life.

When he goes to town, you and your cousins sit behind him for one or two kilometers and then walk back home. In the afternoon, you all watch, and once you see and hear him in the distance, you run to him and ride home behind him.

7

The year of fighting. A dark summer night. You wake up suddenly to your mother and aunt praying behind the adobe stove in our black yak-hair tent. The stove's flickering flames illuminate their anxious, worried faces. Seven families in your camp. The men and older boys all left to fight in the evening, leaving the women, children, and elders. The old neighbor woman's loud prayers and your mother and aunt's preparations to flee worry you the most. Your mother and aunt rush about, preparing to pack the yaks in the pitch-black night amid their never-ending stream of prayers as the old woman in a nearby tent loudly calls out every deity's name she knows, punctuated with scolding the enemies.

8

You return home from somewhere - maybe from herding, a neighbor's home, or maybe after school. A Chinese Phoenix brand bicycle is parked on its stand in front of your home. It is not your dream bicycle, but you are super happy. It is a big challenge to ride. It is taller than you. A year later, you are tired of finding a place to rest one of your feet when you start and stop the bike, so you cut off the top tube on the frame below the handlebars and near the seat post with a hacksaw without anyone's permission. After that, the bike is unbalanced and unstable when anyone rides it.

9

Six days after an elder neighbor's passing, about 200 local men and boys take the corpse to a small valley in Dur khrod before sunrise. Tamarisks, willows, and shrubs cover the lower part of the valley. The deceased's oldest son and local elders designate a place under a small tree where the corpse is wrapped in white cloth. The son and other relatives prostrate. The rest of us stay far back. After a short time of chanting, the sons and relatives leave. An elder unwraps the white cloth. The corpse is black and stinks. They cut the corpse's back and wait for the vultures to come. They don't. Local elders begin cutting the corpse into small pieces. Some don't wear gloves or chop with knives and swords. Bones with flesh are put on rocks and broken into pieces with sticks. A bad odor permeates the area.

You and others wait for the vultures. Thinking. Life, life's purpose, years and years of struggling with anger, hate, greed, wealth, desire for fame, love, jealousy, cruelty...

10

Autumn pasture. You spend most days with your playmates near a brook. You aren't particularly interested in new clothes but enjoy wearing them to show your playmates once you have some. One of your uncles buys you a pair of brilliantly impressive fake leather shoes in the local monastery town. The next day, you cross a brook while you are playing. Somehow, one of your shoes comes off, and the stream carries it away. You rush after it, but you can't catch it. You cry all that afternoon. Finally, your mother promises she'll buy you another pair. You lose about four pairs of shoes as you play with your peers during those years. You feel terrible and cry in frustration each time.

Several years later, you learn those weren't accidents. A playmate planned it all.

TIBETAN TERMS

bla brang ལྷ་བང་།
 chos skyong skyabs ཚམས་སྐྱོང་སྐྱུང་བ།
 dme shul དམེ་ཤུ།
 dur khrod དུར་ཁྱོད།
 ldum lhas ལུམ་ལྷ་ས།
 reb gong རེབ་གོང་།
 rnam thar skyid རྣམ་ཐར་སྐྱིད།
 sgrol ma mtsho སྐྱོལ་མ་མཚོ།
 tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Qiejiangjia 切江加
 Zhongtai 众泰

KNOWING AND UNKNOWING

Chos skyong skyabs ཅོས་སྤྱོད་སྤྱུང་ལ། (Qiejiajiang 切江加)*

When I was about five, my friends and I played with frogs near a small stream in late spring. The stream had many twists and turns as it flowed eastward between our neighbor's house and my home. By mid-spring, the ice had gone. Fresh grass began covering the ground, new flowers appeared, and animals were waking up from hibernation. Marmots were coming out of their dens and making the sounds marmots make here and there. It seemed like they were greeting each other or competing in the volume and length of their noises. Mother birds anxiously constructed new nests to lay eggs. Frogs joined in this symphony, looking for partners to produce tadpoles. These animals were starting a new year. Even people, in the early morning, were full of energy.

My family severely scolded me when I played with water animals because they are nagas and punish you if you hurt them.

"I need two more," Rin bkra announced as he rolled up his sleeves again and clutched about in the unclean water.

After a bit, he brought up two frogs, screamed, and threw them at me. The legs of one frog extended wide like a bat's wings, spinning in the air like a wheel. I nimbly dodged to the right, avoiding it hitting my face. It passed by my left ear, making a particular sound that repeatedly rang in my ears for a long time. An instant after I turned, the frog struck the edge of a boulder and stuck there for a bit before slowly sliding to the ground. Its belly had split, and its entrails exploded everywhere. Of course, it died in a second. The other frog fell on the grass on its back, waving its legs in the air, seemingly begging for help. Rin bkra stood motionless, his face turning pale as he attempted to come near me.

Later, Rin bkra buried the frog in a hole, covered it with soil, and put a flat stone near the head of a spring. He tried to pull me away, but I couldn't move my legs. We were terrified.

* Chos skyong skyabs. Knowing and Unknowing. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:388-391.

"Don't come back here!" he warned.

I worried about the naga's punishment, especially when I recalled a little girl's story that Grandfather had told me:

A little girl lived with a single mother in a small wooden house near a creek in front of a tree-covered mountain. This was a realm of various animals and birds. Birds constantly gave twitter performances rivaling professional musicians displaying their abilities in a concert hall.

The different animals in the forest lived peacefully. There were many stories about that place, but the main idea was that those animals and birds belonged to a powerful naga. People dared not do anything that would offend the naga.

The daughter went to the nearest spring to fetch water every morning with some milk in her wooden bucket, which she sprinkled into the spring, asking the naga to let her fetch water. Unfortunately, she carelessly set her wooden bucket on a small frog's back legs one day, badly hurting it.

Afterward, she fell seriously ill. Her left calf became very itchy, followed by red blisters that grew bigger and bigger. In time, all her calf was infected. Pus oozed from the blisters and gave off a terrible smell. The infected area moved above the knee and spread to her upper body.

Eventually, she couldn't stand by herself, and her legs became thinner and thinner, resembling chopsticks.

That night, I dreamed someone was calling me. I couldn't turn in the direction of the sound nor move my legs, no matter how hard I tried. After a while, an old man with white hair as long as a horsetail appeared. He had toad skin, an angry face, a frightening voice, wore white clothes, and held a cane in his left hand. When he asked me about the previous day's events at the spring, I was so frightened I couldn't move. My left hand covered my mouth. The old man grabbed my neck and pulled me back to the spring. I was dizzy.

We were in a strange place when I regained consciousness. Rin bkra was also there, tied to an ancient tree, his head hung low and tree branches tightly binding his wrists and ankles. He didn't

look at me. His belly had a big bleeding wound. The place was muddy and smelled awful, almost making me lose consciousness again. The old man led me to the King of Nagas. I tried to explain that I had done nothing with the frogs but couldn't make a sound.

Suddenly I started yelling and running, terrified of being grabbed and beaten. My legs wouldn't move as fast as I wanted. Then I woke up just as someone grabbed me from behind.

I dreamed of frogs a million times after that. I have a strong aversion to all water animals. I vomit, feel dizzy when encountering water animals, and have no appetite for several days. I like winter because there are no water animals.

My situation steadily deteriorated. I slept poorly. My family members almost lost hope that I would become normal. I visited many *bla ma*, tantric practitioners, holy places, and monasteries near my home area, seeking a cure. My family sponsored countless religious rituals, but there were no positive results.

I and some relatives happened to meet a tantric practitioner on a Lha sa street when I was fifteen. Glancing at me, he asked one of my relatives, "Is there something wrong with this boy?"

"Yes! Your Holiness," was the instant reply.

The tantric practitioner sat in the street, took out a wooden bowl, and poured water from a bottle into it. He took a *rkang gling* 'human thigh-bone horn' from his shoulder bag, spat water on me, chanted loudly, shook his head, blew the horn, and said, "A powerful naga has attacked this boy. Has he done something bad to nagas?"

After a relative explained everything, the tantric practitioner advised me to return home quickly and do rituals there. He recommended several rituals and scriptures to chant.

We returned home. Nothing changed despite inviting holy *bla ma*, monks, and tantric practitioners daily to our home and the springhead.

Later, we visited a hospital in the capital city. After many examinations, a doctor declared, "This boy will soon go mad if we don't treat him," and used a lot of medical jargon we didn't

Still, we were very interested when he said, "When a child has been terribly scared, fear attacks the heart, which cannot return to normal."

Doctors have asked millions of questions in the past seventy-five days. I've already recovered much more than my relatives, or I expected.

TIBETAN TERMS

bla ma བླ་མ།

chos skyong skyabs ཆོས་སྟོང་སྟལ་བུ།

lha sa ལྟ་ས།

rin bkra རིན་བཀྲ།

rkang gling ཀང་གླིང་།

CHINESE TERM

Qiejiangjia 切江加

INVISIBLE

Chos skyong skyabs མོས་སྐྱོང་སྐྱུང་བ། (Qiejia 切江加)*

Very early in the morning, I was roused by the blaring from Uncle's conch horn announcing that he hadn't offered incense at the top of the mountain. Instead, he was offering incense on the incense platform near our house. I covered my head with my quilt, pretending to sleep. Otherwise, Grandpa would have encouraged me to find Uncle and offer incense with him.

"Real men offer incense often. Otherwise, the deities won't help you when you need it," counseled Grandpa.

"How will they help me? Can I see them?"

"It depends on your behavior. If you offer incense daily, respect them, and ask for their help, they sense that and help you anytime you are in danger. The prerequisite is that you offer enough incense and respect."

"How and where can I meet them if I offer plenty of incense and respect them?"

"It takes time, but if you believe and act properly, you may meet one. They will appear in your dreams. You may chat with them in your dreams."

I heard many stories about deities when I was older. Khyab chen Deity in my home area is a mountain. No one knows when we offered him incense and made a *lab tse* for him. I heard a story from a local elder, Mgon po, who lives at the foot of Mount Khayb chen. He has never stopped offering incense to Khayb chen since his family moved there. It is his daily duty. A few years after living there, he stopped women from going to the top of the mountain and stopped female animals from grazing on the higher part of the mountain. Mgon bo maintained the mountain resembled a deity's body, so females may contaminate the deity because their identity is lower than males. He also forbade anyone from peeing on the

¹ Chos skyong skyabs. 2023. Invisible. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:392-393.

Afterward, many surprising things happened to Mgon po. He dreamed the man with a white horse called him outside his house. Mgon po immediately went outside and saw thieves driving his yaks. The thieves fled. Another time, while offering incense on the mountain, he sensed something very near him but couldn't see anything. Later, watching his offerings fly from the flame into the air, he sensed that the invisible horseman was near him and immediately knew it was consuming his offerings. This greatly excited him.

After sharing this marvelous story with one of his friends, news spread through the local community. Later, Mgon po became mentally ill. When researchers and reporters visited and asked him about it, he was bewildered and couldn't speak clearly.

TIBETAN TERMS

chos skyong skyabs ཆས་སྒྲོང་སྒྲུབས།

khyab chen ལྷན་ཆེན།

lab tse ལའ་ཙེ།

mgon po མགོན་པོ།

CHINESE TERM

Qiejiangjia 切江加

RDO RJE'S GHOST RESEARCH

Chos skyong skyabs མཚོ་སྒྲོང་སྒྲུབ་པ། (Qiejiangjia 切江加)*

There are many stories and definitions of ghosts and much ongoing vigorous debate about what a ghost is. Many knowledgeable people, including religious scholars, have debated ghost questions for ages: When did ghosts first appear? When did humans first have the idea of ghosts? What, exactly, is a ghost? Do ghosts even exist?

Rdo rje returned home to complete research for his Ph.D. thesis. Enrolled in the Parapsychology Department of a renowned UK university, he had studied God, gods, deities, spooks, banshees, ghosts, ghouls, specters, souls, spirits, wraiths, phantoms, demons, evils, etc. His department was busily digging into old questions surrounding these ideas, eager to find clear answers. It also had ample resources to support students in research and provided technical devices deemed essential in finding and supporting answers.

Rdo rje was focused on showing proof that ghosts exist. He grew up where the supernatural was a daily reality. He had heard at least a thousand accounts of ghosts. Before becoming a college student, he had never doubted the existence of such entities. However, his ideas began changing after contact with modern ideas.

Eager to identify those who had seen and experienced ghostly manifestations once he was back home, Rdo rje interviewed and recorded information from nearly one hundred locals willing to share their stories. He also planned to put cameras in haunted places at night, hoping to find evidence of ghosts.

Uncle Zla ba had heard about Rdo rje's questions and asked, with a warm smile, "Do I need to tell you ghost stories?" when Rdo rje visited.

"Yes! Uncle Zla ba, how are you doing?"

* Chos skyong skyabs. Rdo rje's Ghost Research. 2023. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:394-397.

"I'm doing well," Uncle Zla ba replied, and after pausing a while, began:

Ghosts are the spirits of those who died from a tragic accident or committed suicide. Their spirits stay where the event occurred. Human eyes rarely see ghosts, but horses and dogs can. For example, three shepherds once drove their sheep to a place where nobody lived. During mealtime after some ten days, one of the men said, "Today I met a gorgeous woman on the mountain who sang several love songs that suggested she is single and looking for a spouse. I must visit her tonight because that's what I promised her today."

He quickly finished his meal and rode away on his black horse.

The next day, he described what had happened to his fellows: "She and her mother live in a tent behind this mountain. She told me her mother left on a pilgrimage two months ago. She thinks her mother will not return. She has smooth, warm skin and amazingly soft and round breasts."

One friend said, "Lucky you! Is she beautiful?"

"She didn't let me see her face, but I think so."

This man often left after their evening meal. His two companions wondered why they had never seen a woman nearby. Increasingly suspicious, they followed him one evening after he left. The man crossed a mountain, reached the lower valley, tied his horse's reins to a bush, untied his Tibetan robe, lay next to a stone, and began chatting. Shocked, the other two men left to seek advice from a local bla ma.

"Right! But, hmm... please tell me your own experiences!" Rdo rje interjected.

Uncle Zla ba thought for a while and said:

I don't have any personal experiences, but 'Brug dkar told me a story recently. I'm not sure who exactly was involved, but two of our young men went night dating. Returning to their homes, they walked through Nyag dmar Valley. When one needed to answer nature's call, his companion waited nearby. Suddenly, a dog ran towards him. He pulled out his dog-beater and whirled it. As the dog got closer, he urged his friend to help, but he remained squatting, ignoring him. Alone and fearful,

he whirled his dog-beater and struck out at the dog before realizing there was no dog – he was beating a boulder.

Discussing what had happened, the two friends concluded the dog was a ghost and quickly left.

Rdo rje was keenly interested in this account, thinking he was on the verge of a significant discovery, so he left Uncle Zla ba and went to 'Brug dkar's home. 'Brug dkar said he had heard the story from another man, so Rdo rje next went to interview him. Rdo rje met several men in turn before finally meeting the two young men involved, who told him the story's original version, which was much different from what he had heard from Uncle Zla ba.

One said he was bored that night while waiting for his friend, so he just took out his dog-beater and whirled it, pretending he was fighting a dog. The other man related the story of the dog-ghost differently. He said that while defecating, his friend, who was about ten meters away, was whirling his dog-beater. It looked like he was beating something and shouted, "Hurry up! A dog is attacking!"

This seemed weird since he was near me, and I couldn't see any dog. Suddenly, my friend laughed and said, "Defecate more quickly next time. Let's go home."

I then realized that he was pretending and that there had been no dog attack.

Despite weeks of painstaking research, Rdo rje could not find any verifiable local accounts. He noticed that the ghost stories became more varied and elaborate, with more exciting and dramatic details as they passed from teller to teller.

Still, in pursuit of ghosts, Rdo rje chose several places described as haunted, such as the local *dur khrod* 'sky burial grounds' and places where people had died in car accidents, to surveil. He positioned cameras at night, but nothing appeared in his video records. After losing some expensive equipment, he concluded that ghosts probably stole them.

Convinced he had found something new about ghosts, he considered how to use this information to document local ghosts, complete his thesis, and look for suitable employment.

TIBETAN TERMS

'brug dkar འབྲུག་དཀར།

bla ma བླ་མ།

chos skyong skyabs ཚོས་སྐྱོང་སྐྱམས།

dur khrod དུར་ཁྲོད།

nyag dmar ཉག་དམར།

rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།

zla ba ཟླ་བ།

CHINESE TERM

Qiejiangjia 切江加

Zla ba dbyangs can ལྷ་བ་དབྱངས་ཅན།*

CHARACTERS

Narrator: saved by Dpal mo when she attempted suicide.

Dpal mo: a sex worker, Dbyangs 'dzin's mother, lived with the narrator.

Dbyangs 'dzin: daughter of the man and Dpal mo.

The man: Dbyangs 'dzin's father, Dpal mo's former client.

"Did she sleep?" I asked as Dpal mo walked into my room and sat on my bed with a tired smile.

"Yeah. She was sleepy last night."

"Poor Dbyangs 'dzin."

"Yesterday, that Barbie doll made her so excited and happy."

True. We can't afford such toys.

"Will he come tomorrow?"

"Probably not."

Her reply gladdened me, but my future wouldn't be easy now that he had found them.

"He likes her, right?"

"Maybe, but I think it's just because Dbyangs 'dzin is his daughter. He's indifferent to most people. At first, I was afraid he wouldn't like her."

It made me uncomfortable that she understood him so well.

"Did you tell Dbyangs 'dzin that the man who gave her the Barbie doll is her father?"

"Not yet. His attitude's not clear. He said he would accept Dbyangs 'dzin, but he must ask his father if their family would accept her. My little girl will suffer if her father abandons her."

Dbyangs 'dzin was a smart, sensitive little girl, so I guess she

* Zla ba dbyangs can. 2023. Again. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:398-400.

knew, but I didn't say that to Dpal mo. I only said, "Yeah, maybe you can tell her later. So, will you marry him?"

"Don't ask me again! He hurt me so many times, but he represents normal life. Not just for me but also Dbyangs 'dzin."

She stood and walked into the kitchen. Her phone rang. I couldn't hear what she said, but when she started shouting, I was worried and was about to get up. Then she came into my bedroom again in tears.

"Dpal mo! What happened?" Dbyangs 'dzin was sleeping, so I asked softly.

Dpal mo quietly sobbed. She had a fragile beauty when she was helpless. I impulsively kissed her without thinking. Not a passionate kiss, just a tender touch on the lips. She stopped crying suddenly and was silent with downcast eyes. I was afraid. Her silence had sapped my courage.

"Honey..." she said haltingly.

I wouldn't apologize for my "offense." I had helped her when her man had abandoned her, and she had nowhere to go. I took her in, cared for her daughter, and believed I was the only one who wouldn't denigrate her because of her work.

"Who called?"

"His mother. She called to insult me again."

"She can't oppose your marriage to her son anymore, right? After all, he lost the ability to reproduce in a recent car accident."

"Yeah, but I'm still afraid of her."

This time she spoke in a victimized, sorrowful way so I would feel sorry for her. She wanted to be well-off and had already decided to leave me. I felt sick.

"Well, maybe you can please him or his father. Men can always resolve women's problems in one way or another, right? Your man controls you and his mother."

I didn't wait for her to reply before adding. "You don't have to worry, do you? Dbyangs 'dzin is a girl, but his only child and you have plenty of experience pleasing men."

Another offense, but I didn't care. I was nearly crazy because

I believed she would leave me for a secure life. I would then return to a solitary existence. That horrible man, not Dpal mo's former client but my ex-husband, would fill my mind again. My fear of him would resume. Nightmares of him beating me would return. I would again despise living, but maybe I would find another kind-hearted woman during my next suicide attempt.

"Dear, I don't want to think about this anymore. Maybe we can discuss it tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah, fine," I said.

Later that morning, I threw the cheap lipstick she had given me on my birthday in a dustbin.

TIBETAN TERMS

dpal mo དཔལ་མོ།

dbyangs 'dzin དབྱངས་འཛིན།

zla ba dbyangs can ལྷ་བ་དབྱངས་ཅན།

FILM REVIEWS

REVIEW: *AN AMDO TIBETAN WOMAN'S DAILY LIFE*

Reviewed by Gengqiugelai 更求格来 (Konchok Gelek,
Dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།)*



Klu thar rgyal (director, producer).
2021. *An Amdo Tibetan Woman's
Daily Life*. 36.55 mins.
<https://bit.ly/31rxoWq>, Tibetan,
English subtitles. Color.

Klu thar rgyal filmed *An Amdo Tibetan Woman's Daily Life* at his family home in Tsha nag (Chanaihai) Community, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China using an iPhone 11 Pro. This is a valuable addition to his expanding oeuvre focused on his home area, including the past's everyday (Klu thar rgyal et al. 2021) and present (Klu thar rgyal 2017, Ku thar rgyal 2021).¹

The film follows Klu thar rgyal's mother, Kun thar skyid (b. 1972), from when she gets up in the morning through her daily activity. These activities include making a fire in the home; chanting and making offerings; preparing *rtsam pa* 'parched barley flour mixed with hot tea, butter, and dry cheese', milk tea, yogurt, bread, and dumplings; feeding three cows with straw; collecting cattle and sheep dung; piling and winnowing dung; skinning a dead lamb; heating a tap so her family and livestock will have water; and using social media to learn written Tibetan in the evening.

* Gengqiugelai (Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs. 2023. Review: *An Amdo Tibetan Woman's Daily Life*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:402-412.

¹ Related work on Amdo includes photographs ('Jam dbyangs skyabs and Klu thar rgyal et al. 2018) and a translation of English to Tibetan of Tuttle (2019).

INTRODUCTION

The setting is Kun thar skyid's home and immediate environs - the sunny side of a hill in the family's fenced winter pasture at 3,400 meters above sea level. The film starts as Kun thar skyid intones *Rje btsun' phags ma sgrol ma la bstod pa bzhugs so 'Praise to the Twenty-one Taras'*,¹ pulls on an old lambskin robe, makes a fire in a stove using straw and dried cow dung in a room in the family's house where she sleeps, cooks, and eats with her husband and three children.

Daybreak has yet to come.

After washing her face and hands, she goes to the family's shrine room. She offers water to images of Buddha, the tenth PaN chen (1938-1989), local *bla ma* (e.g., LA mo yongs 'dzin rin po che), Bka' 'gyur,² Yum dum pa bcu gnyis,³ 'Phags pa brgyad stong ba 'Astasahastrika Prajna Paramita,⁴ and Sangs rgyas sman bla 'the Medicine Buddha' on a large shelf. She offers a butter lamp, turns a prayer wheel, prostrates seven times, recharges an electric butter lamp, and makes two offerings. One offering is smoldering *rtsam pa*, and the other is smoldering roasted barley grains with juniper and fresh milk tea. Both offerings are for *chos skyong srung ma*⁵

¹ "Tara is a tantric meditation deity whose practice is used by practitioners of the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and understand outer, inner and secret teachings about compassion and emptiness" <https://bit.ly/3GsyuEn> 13 January 2022.

² A sacred collection of Tibetan Buddhist literature representing the "Word of the Buddha" of some 1,000 works. Most were originally written in Sanskrit and translated after the eighth century. In the thirteenth century, the collection was published in one hundred volumes <https://bit.ly/3qHEunn> 20 January 2022.

³ Believing that this brings good health and fortune, many local families have this twelve-volume work (*Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag brgyad pa*) in their homes.

⁴ The best-known Buddhist work from 100 BCE to 100 CE. See more at <https://bit.ly/2NJKQ2w> 7 April 2021.

⁵ Dam can and Dpal ldan lha mo are protective female deities of the Dge lugs Sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

'protective deities' and Yul lha Deity.¹

Around sunrise, Kun thar skyid goes to the family's cowshed with a plastic bucket, where she finds one cow with a broken tether. It has a calf, so this cow has no milk for Kun thar skyid and her family that day. One of the other cows is pregnant, and the other has a newborn calf. After washing her hands, she milks the new mother, leaving two teats untouched for the calf. Her bucket is now almost full of milk.

Kun thar skyid returns from milking to the room where she made a fire and begins heating the milk in a large pot. Her husband and daughter have just gotten up, so she prepares a breakfast of *rtsam pa*, milk tea, and fried bread. She chats with her husband while having breakfast, periodically adding sheep dung to the fire in the stove. Her husband talks about his plan to visit a local older woman and other families, and she is supportive as long as he doesn't drink. After the milk boils, she mixes it with some previous yogurt in a wooden bucket, wraps the bucket with a thick cloth to hold the temperature so it is warm enough to make the yogurt, and places the bucket in the corner of the room so no one will accidentally knock it over.

Kun thar skyid makes bread dough in the morning, puts it in an aluminum pot in the afternoon, and covers it with smoldering hot sheep-dung ash near the house in a hole that is deep enough so it is unlikely nearby grass will catch fire. She worries she might accidentally fall into the hole.

Kun thar skyid's husband comes out of the house after breakfast, carries three straw bales near the house, and scatters them on the ground. After pouring oat seed in metal troughs for sheep in an empty enclosure, he comments that his family's sheep are some of the best local sheep. The sheep race out and feed on the oat seed as he opens the door of the sheep enclosure. After finishing,

¹ Yul = 'place' 'designated place'; lha = 'deity'. A *yul lha* is understood to be male. Local laymen pray to and worship him, beseeching help in matters related to herding, farming, traveling, and wealth (Karmay 2010:250).

they rush to the straw scattered on the ground.

Kun thar skyid goes to the pile of bales near the straw storage room, collects straw in a bag near the bales, carries it to the cow enclosure, and feeds the cows. She separates a cow prone to butting the other cows and sheep and feeds it outside the enclosure.

Kun thar skyid goes a short distance from the house to check a community water source, but when she turns the tap, she realizes it is frozen, so there is no water, which has been the situation for some days. She feels sorry for other locals who will have to get water from another water source that is far away.

Her family has a water tank near the house. The water tank spigot is frozen, so she heats it using smoldering sheep-dung ash. After the spigot thaws, water flows to troughs near the water tank to water the sheep.

Kun thar skyid struggles to skin a half-frozen dead lamb and comments that it probably died from eating wool. She throws the carcass to the family watchdog, sticks the skin on a wall to dry to prevent the family's cat from eating it, and describes making skins into robes.

Kun thar skyid puts cow dung in a bag and carries it on her back to a dung pile near the cow enclosure. After using a big broom to collect sheep dung pellets in the sheep enclosure, she puts them in a bag, carries it to a pile of dung, and winnows the pellets, commenting that this requires about two hours. She adds that in the past, lambs froze if she didn't collect sheep dung regularly from the enclosure. Though this is no longer a threat, thanks to a good sheep enclosure, she explains that collecting dung is necessary for cooking and heating fuel.

At sunset, Kun thar skyid makes dumplings on the *hu tse* 'adobe sleeping-seating platform' near the stove. Her daughter joins her. As Kun thar skyid washes utensils and cleans the room, her oldest son teaches his sister Chinese sign language.

Kun thar skyid checks her phone and comments in amazement at someone making a beautiful *zhun* 'Tibetan cake' on social media. After finishing home chores, she rests on the family's

hu tse, holding a phone in one hand and a pocketbook in the other. She listens to WeChat and explains that a local teacher daily teaches one page from the pocketbook (*Bde smon dang bzang spyod smon lam* 'Book of Collected Prayers'). She repeats what she hears and reads to her teacher what she has learned that day via WeChat. The film ends.

An Amdo Tibetan Woman's Daily Life is not alone in visually documenting ethnographic detail of the lives of female Tibetans. Lynn True et al. (2010) *Summer Pasture* created in a herding area in Rdza chu kha (Shiqu) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province; and Jamyang ['Jam dbyangs] (2021) made *One Wife and Her Three Husbands* shot in a farming area in Sa skya (Sajia) County, Gzhis ka rtse (Rikaze) City, Tibet Autonomous Region. Both films include the tasks Tibetan wives and husbands assume to ensure the household runs smoothly.

Puhuadangzhi (2006) *Tibetan Woman's Daily Life*, Gu ru 'phrin las (2020)¹ *A Tibetan Herdswoman*, and Jamyang ['Jam dbyangs] (2021) *Himalayan Hard-Living Woman* concentrate on a day in a Tibetan housewife's life. Puhuadangzhi shot the film in a farming area in Xunhua Salar [Sala] Autonomous County, Mtsho shar (Haidong) City, Mtsho sngon Province. The main character is mainly involved with housework, fieldwork, feeding livestock (swine, a cow, a mule), and collecting wood for fuel. Gu ru 'phrin las' film focuses on a yak herding area in Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. The main character is an adult woman who milks yaks, collects yak dung for fuel, and collects caterpillar fungus. Jamyang's *Himalayan Hard-Living Woman*, filmed in an agricultural area² in the Tibet Autonomous Region, features milking yaks, making yogurt, and weeding in fields.

Anonymous (2018) filmed collecting yak dung and making stoves from mud in winter by two Tibetan herdswomen (no detailed

¹ This is an abbreviated version of his longer film, *Jeopardy*.

² Specific location is not given.

location given).

Chaud (2007) and Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung (2008) were shot in villages in Zanskar (Ladakh) and highlighted women harvesting crops and two adolescent sisters' life choices, respectively.¹

...

Kun thar skyid's daily mundane chores from dawn to dusk portray real life without a hint of artificial performance, made possible by her relationship with the cameraman, her son. The lack of a recorded soundtrack emphasizes this lack of artificiality. Instead, the bleating of sheep; a dog barking; noises of Kun thar skyid's movements; sounds made by fire, water, and wind; and the family's non-performative conversation position these images in an authentic framework of Tibetan winter days.

Certain aspects of this film deserve further attention. When Kun thar skyid has a moment of her own, she studies how to read Tibetan through social media networks, demonstrating the spontaneous, grassroots-level eliminate-illiteracy movement. Kun thar skyid has qualities many rural Tibetan women share. She is hardworking, spiritual, dutiful, and caring. In combination, these characteristics create the backbone of a household and society at large. Kun thar skyid's wrinkled face and downturned eyes further express her life in a perpetual cycle of chores with no end in sight.

Although the family's living circumstances have changed from mobile pastoralism to a settled life with electricity and more convenient access to water, life continues to change. Kun thar skyid may be the last generation of traditional housewives wearing heavy, inconvenient robes while working. The impact of education and the opportunities it provides substantially differentiate her children from her generation. For example, Kun thar skyid's rough overworked hands are in sharp contrast to her daughter's pale

¹ Feature films by Pad ma tshe brtan (e.g., *Tharlo*, *Balloon*, *Jinpa*) and Zon thar rgyal (e.g., *River*) have made feature films with hired performers in key roles. See Khashem Gyal (2017), Phun tshogs dbang rgyal (2017), and Robin (2020) for more.

hands with polished blueish nails, whose fashionable appearance further suggests she has opted for a lifestyle very different from that of her mother's generation.

In little more than thirty-six minutes, this film accomplishes a great deal by intimately portraying an unromanticized day in Kun thar skyid's winter life and, more broadly, the lives of rural Tibetan women in 2021 and sheep raising in Mtsho lho.

Kun thar skyid speaking directly to the camera is particularly valuable.

This pastoralist community will continue to evolve, emphasizing this film's relevance and value to Tibetologists, Mtsho sngon specialists, and students of Himalayan communities, and as a chronicle of Tibetan rural life in transition in the early 2020s. Given the ubiquity of mobile phones and their constantly improving camera features, this film challenges young people across the Tibetosphere to produce video/audio records of home life.

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Zon thar rgyal རོན་ཐར་རྒྱལ། (director and screenplay); Wang Meng 王猛 (cinematographer); Stag rtse don 'grub ལྷག་ཅེ་དོན་བྲལ། (artistic director); Gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུགས་དཀར་ཅེ་རིང། (sound & music); Sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱལ། and Alexandra Sun (producers); Pad ma tshe brtan པད་མ་ཅེ་བརྟན། and Du Qingchun 杜庆春 (co-producers); Kong Jinglei 孔劲蕾 (editor); and Rig 'dzin sgrol ma རིག་འཛིན་སྒྲོལ་མ། Dbyangs can lha mo དབྱངས་ཅན་ལྷ་མོ།, and Gu ru tshe brtan གུ་རུ་ཅེ་བརྟན། (performers). 2015. *Gtsang po* གཅང་པོ། [River]. Drama Films.

TIBETAN TERMS

'brog pa འབྲོག་པ།

'jam dbyangs འཇམ་དབྱངས།

'phags pa brgyad stong ba

འཕགས་པ་བརྒྱད་སྟོང་བ།

'phags pa don grub

འཕགས་པ་དོན་བྲལ།

amdo, a mdo མ་མདོ།

bde smon dang bzang spyod

སྐྱོད་མཁའ་ལྷན་པ།

bla ma བླ་མ།

bka' 'gyur བཀའ་འགྱུར།

chos skyong srung ma

ཆོས་སྐྱོང་སྲུང་མ།

dam can དམ་ཅན།

dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།

dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།

dpal ldan lha mo དཔལ་ལྷན་ལྷ་མོ།

dpal rgyal དཔལ་རྒྱལ།

gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།

gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

gzhis ka rtse གཞིས་ཀ་རཅེ།

hu tse ཁུ་ཅེ།

klu thar rgyal ལྷ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

kun thar skyid ལུན་ཐར་སྐྱིད།

la mo yongs 'dzin rin po che

ལ་མོ་ཡོངས་འཛིན་རིན་པོ་ཅེ།

lha mo mtsho ལྷ་མོ་མཚོ།

mgo log མགོ་ལོག།

mgo mang མགོ་མང།

mkha' byams rgyal

མཁའ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho shar མཚོ་ཤར།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

paN chen པཎ་ཅེན།

pad ma tshe brtan པད་མ་ཅེ་བརྟན།

phun tshogs dbang rgyal

ཕུན་ཚོགས་དབང་རྒྱལ།

rdo rje རྩེ་རྩེ།

rdza chu kha རྩ་ཅུ་ཀ་མ།

rin chen རིན་ཅེན།

rje btsun 'phags ma sgrol ma

la bstod pa bzhugs so རེ་བཅུན་

འཕགས་མ་སྒྲོལ་མ་ལ་བཞོད་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

rtsam pa རུས་པ།

sa skya ས་སྐལ།
 sangs rgyas sman bla སངས་རྒྱལ་སྐལ་བླ་
 བླ།
 sgrol ma སྐྱོལ་མ།
 shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin
 pa stong phrag brgyad pa
 ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་བརྒྱད་པ།

thar lo ཐར་ལོ།
 tsha nag ཇ་ནག
 yul lha ཡུལ་ལྷ།
 yum dum pa bcu gnyis
 ཡུམ་དུམ་པ་བརྒྱ་གཉིས།
 zhun ཞུན།
 zon thar rgyal ཞོན་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

CHINESE TERMS

Chanaihai 查乃亥
 Gengqiugelai 更求格来
 Guoluo 果洛
 Haidong 海东
 Ganzi 甘孜
 Hainan 海南
 Jiuzhi 久治

Puhuadangzhi 普华当智
 Qinghai 青海
 Rikaze 日喀则
 Sajia 萨迦
 Sala 撒拉
 Shiqu 石渠
 Xunhua 循化

REVIEW: *JEOPARDY AND A TIBETAN
HERDSWOMAN'S LIFE: 16 HOURS IN A
DAY* BY GU RU 'PHRIN LAS གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས་

Reviewed by Chos skyong skyabs ཚོས་སྤྱོད་སྤྱུང་། (Qiejiangjia 切江加)*



Gu ru 'phrin las (director, cinematographer, editor). 2020. *Pha sa* [*Jeopardy*]. Documentary Film. 106 mins. A mdo Tibetan dialect with English subtitles (<https://bit.ly/3xybajJ> 2 January 2022).



Gu ru 'phrin las (director, cinematographer, editor). 2020. *A Tibetan Herdsman's Life: 16 Hours in a Day*. 21 mins. A mdo Tibetan dialect with English subtitles, (<https://bit.ly/39JJUff> 2 January 2022).

INTRODUCTION

I first introduce Gu ru 'phrin las' (hereafter: Gu ru) film and literary oeuvre before commenting on his documentary *Pha sa 'Jeopardy'* and an abbreviated version of the same film - *A Tibetan Herdsman's Life: 16 Hours in a Day*.

My life experiences growing up in an A mdo Tibetan area with a family that continues to herd yaks and sheep on high-altitude pastures help me understand and interpret Gu ru's works. We lived year-round in a black yak-hair tent until about 1997. Before attending middle school, I herded our livestock and annually collected caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) on our

* Chos skyong skyabs (Qiejiangjia). 2023. Review: *Jeopardy* and a *Tibetan Herdsman's Life: 16 Hours in a Day* Gu ru 'phrin las. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:413-425.

summer pasture. Images of locals hunkered over and kneeling, slowly moving about on gray mountains searching for caterpillar fungus on rainy-snowy, chilly days are enduring memories. In the last two decades, my home area is also experiencing deteriorating grassland due to overgrazing and a growing number of pikas.

Gu ru was born and raised in a herding area more than 4,000 meters above sea level, in Smin thang (Mentang) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. His family had neither a radio nor a television when he was a child. His grandmother's narratives proved influential in this environment, immersing him in a vivid, imaginary world. He started school at the age of eight. From 2013-2017, he studied Tibetan literature at Northwest Minzu University in Lan gru (Lanzhou) and invested much effort in learning English.¹

Gu ru's Youtube channel (<https://bit.ly/3CxJEFm> 2 January 2022) features some of his documentary work:

(1) *Painful Transformation* (20.29 mins, <https://bit.ly/3ufqSQo>, 2016; 2 January 2022), shot with an iPhone 6, is based on a local woman's experiences coming to terms with her youngest son's murder during a gambling session and a second son's suicide. Defeating internal chaos, she eventually creates a peaceful life for herself.²

(2) *Inspiration* (15 mins, <https://bit.ly/3oe3MIR>, 2019; 2 January 2022) was also made in Smin thang Township. In 2016, Grub pa was a nine-year-old boy living with his grandparents in a herding area. His illiterate grandfather had herded livestock all his life. Recognizing the difficulties this foreshadowed, he tried various ways to interest the boy in study, but his grandson insisted he was more interested in herding.

¹ Gu ru 'phrin las. 2019. *Remembering Tomorrow* <https://bit.ly/2QAU4hX> 8 July 2021.

² Gu ru 'phrin las. 2017. Interview: Filmmaker. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 44:388-393 <https://bit.ly/3JsH5cf> 29 December 2021.

(3) Short pieces on local life include three folksongs, four games, five stories, two riddles, salting yaks, saddling a horse, packing a yak, and Ge sar festivities.¹

In 2021, Gu ru published *Remembering Tomorrow*, nineteen narratives based on local elders' experiences and memories.² During an interview, Gu ru commented:

The accessibility of government schooling has translated into less familiarity with local traditions. Knowledge of local songs, proverbs, riddles, games, oral stories, and understandings of life experiences and skills are no longer transmitted. Communicated from generation to generation, these aspects of our culture make us unique, and it is important to preserve them. With the widespread popularity of television and cell phones, many children have limited interest in traditional knowledge. We must find ways to share and pass this knowledge to children.³

With a long winter and a short cold summer (annual precipitation of 764 millimeters⁴), locals focus on herding yaks - an essential source of food and family income - and a few horses and

¹ Three folksongs (A, 1.21 mins, <https://bit.ly/3zM6Pu6> 31 December 2021; B, 1.41 mins, <https://bit.ly/3mb8IMa> 31 December 2021; C, 1.16 mins, <https://bit.ly/3CTw8MI> 31 December 2021; three games (A, 7 mins, <https://bit.ly/3EYRBFJ> 31 December 2021; B, 9.52 mins, <https://bit.ly/3mb96u6> 31 December 2021; C, 6.47 mins, <https://bit.ly/3zNQCUU> 31 December 2021; D, 3.47 mins, <https://bit.ly/3oe3MIR> 31 December 2021; five stories (A, 1.37 mins, <https://bit.ly/3kNizbn> 31 December 2021; B, 14.53 mins, <https://bit.ly/2XWCqf5> 31 December 2021; C, 5.17 mins, <https://bit.ly/3zKsOkP> 31 December 2021; D, 10.10 mins, <https://bit.ly/2XTJ45U> 31 December 2021; E, 4.34 mins), <https://bit.ly/3osDwL9> 31 December 2021; two riddles (A, 0.39 mins, <https://bit.ly/3kMzDOB> 31 December 2021; B, 9.2 mins), <https://bit.ly/3ifvCAB> 31 December 2021; salting yaks (6.26 mins), <https://bit.ly/3AQNN6Z> 31 December 2021; saddling a horse (2.18 mins), <https://bit.ly/3CRwCTl> 31 December 2021; packing a yak (6.18 mins, <https://bit.ly/3o8LFEE> 31 December 2021; and Ge sar festivities (6.1 mins, <https://bit.ly/3zIgXDT> 31 December 2021).

² Gu ru 'phrin las. 2019. *Remembering Tomorrow* <https://amzn.to/3kNuV3c> 8 July 2021.

³ An edited version of my WeChat interview with Gu ru 'phrin las (19 May 2021).

⁴ Gcig sgril County official website <https://bit.ly/3zdSnfs> 8 July 2021.

sheep. In the last three decades, caterpillar fungus has become an important income source (Zhang 2003), with many locals collecting it annually for about two months. Historically, sheep were grazed, but there are few today due to a lack of people-power (small family size and children attending school and thus no longer available to herd) and rampant predation from wolves.

Jeopardy, the primary focus of this review, has three parts: *Prologue*, *Sowing Grass Seed*, and *A Tibetan Herdswoman's Daily Life*, shot with an iPhone XS Max in May 2020 in Smin thang Township.

"Prologue" features several locals collecting caterpillar fungus on a mountain. The camera pans the general area before focusing on a young man who comments that caterpillar fungus have decreased in the past few years. The following shots are of pika-damaged grassland and distressing scenes of dead yaks and two men helping a weak yak stand.

In *Sowing Grass Seed*, a minibus refuels and crosses a bridge over the Yellow River before entering a herding community where local adults have arrived by car and motorcycle. Some local adults prepare lunch after scattering and mixing grass seeds with soil on the grassland using rakes and yak horns. Four men go to a nearby home with a large plastic container to fetch hot water added to each person's lunch – instant noodles in disposable plastic bowls. They also choose from beverages, including Pepsi, Sprite, Jianlibao,¹ and Master Kong Iced Lemon Black Tea.²

After this group meal, noodle bowls, bottles, and boxes are collected near the lunch site. A local man arrives on a motorcycle with an empty plastic beverage bottle, siphons gasoline from his motorcycle tank, sprinkles it on the garbage, and ignites it.

¹ Jianlibao "a treasure to strengthen health" was the first soda pop created in PR China. Debuting as the Chinese team's official drink at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, sponsorships from sports teams and marketing as an energy drink made Jianlibao a popular Chinese soft drink in the 1990s <https://bit.ly/3nYWOFY> 5 November 2021.

² This drink has a sweet and slightly sour, lemony taste <https://bit.ly/3lmb635> 23 November 2021.

A local elder explains that pikas damage the grassland by digging holes, turning it into bare earth. He adds that to counter this degradation, locals collected seeds from indigenous grass, tossed the seeds on the ground, sprinkled crumbled yak dung as fertilizer over the seeds, and covered the seeds as mentioned above.

Another elder recalls this place was once a beautiful, rich grassland without bare earth. The locals are now trying to counter this damage by pikas by planting grass seeds. The elders are confident the earth will regenerate if the pikas do not eat the seeds.

The first elder says to the camera:

Sgo med¹ was a beautiful grassland, and everyone wanted to live here, where it was easy to herd livestock. This was the tribal leader's land. Nowadays, pikas damage the grassland by digging burrows.

Locals explain deteriorating grassland as the result of overgrazing. The livestock repeatedly tread with their hard hooves on the same limited land area, leading to bare earth and erosion, further exacerbated by the arrival of pikas in large numbers. Additionally, when locals collect caterpillar fungus in late spring and early summer, pikas further damage the grassland if they do not put the soil back after digging.

The condensed version of *Pha sa - A Tibetan Herdswoman's Daily Life* begins on a snowy, foggy day with a herdswoman milking in her family's yak enclosure. In the next shot, before the herdswoman and her family leave for the mountains, one of her daughters and a son arrive from their winter pasture by minibus. Planning on spending most of the day in the mountains, the herdswoman and her daughter carry two school bags of bread, biscuits, and cups. While the son and daughter climb up the mountain, the herdswoman and her husband each ride a horse to drive the family's yaks up the mountain to graze before joining their son and daughter to collect caterpillar fungus.

¹ The name of a tribe, the name of a place, and the setting of this documentary.

Around ten AM, the herdsman and her family reach mid-mountain and search for caterpillar fungus, squatting on the shady slope. The variable weather is highlighted: lunch begins as it snows, but the sun shines by the meal's end.

In the late afternoon, the herdsman and her family drive the yaks near a colored steel laminboard structure in the summer pasture, where they pitched a blue canvas tent nearby. The herdsman is soon occupied caring for a newborn yak calf that its mother refuses to nurse because she is weak from lack of forage.

When darkness comes, the herdsman makes a yak-dung fire in a metal stove, boils tea, and returns to the yak enclosure to feed the new, weak mothers. She tethers ten female yaks in a line and offers them *bya rtug* 'feed pellets'.

Later in the evening, all the family members gather in a tent of about twenty square meters. A metal stove used for cooking also provides heat. Food and containers are on one side of the tent. A large adobe sleeping-eating platform is on the other side, where the herdsman's husband rests from collecting caterpillar fungus and tending livestock while the herdsman and her daughter prepare dinner.

The herdsman's son sits near the stove and calculates the day's earnings from their caterpillar fungus collection while the daughter makes dough for the noodles and chops yak meat. The solar panels provide limited electricity for light, so a flashlight is used when more light is needed.

A Tibetan Herdsman's Daily Life focuses on a single day in this woman's life, depicting her onerous daily tasks in real time. When asked about her life choices, she comments:

We don't know how to do business. We can't read and write, so people will cheat us if we open a shop. Also, getting fuel in the township town is hard, and getting dairy products and meat isn't easy. It's better [for us] to herd yaks for more years.

She mentions the lack of forage for yaks because of the pika-damaged grassland resulting in weak yaks that she must hand feed.

She comments that they must feed yaks more now than in earlier times. The family had purchased 2,500 kg of *bya rtug*¹ from the local township town to feed about sixty yaks from March to June.

She hopes they will not continue herding livestock after her daughter graduates from university.

From the herdsman's daily life, we better understand her significant and burdensome contribution to the family. She is busy milking, cooking, herding, collecting caterpillar fungus, feeding animals, and preparing meals from early morning to late night.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

I now compare the films in this review to documentaries of a similar nature on YouTube filmed in A mdo Tibetan areas. I place these films in the following categories: touristic advertisements, random shots, videos of photo collections, and short documentaries.

YouTube places videos in three searchable categories according to duration: under four minutes, four to twenty minutes, and over twenty minutes. Touristic advertisements, random shots, and photo collection videos focus on landscapes, animals, and people for under four minutes. For instance, *Tibetan Nomad Life; Come with Us to Experience the Authentic Nomadic Life in Amdo*² *Tibet*³ gives 2.28 minutes of landscape (clouds and mountains with prayer flags), sheep, yaks, two white men riding horses, and a woman milking in front of her family's black yak-hair tent. Later, she is inside the tent operating a milk separator and tending to a fire burning in a metal stove. The soundtrack is Gangs ljongs yul la ltad mor phebs⁴ 'Come to Visit Tibetan Areas'. This video is representative of several films (*A 2500km Trip into Amdo*,⁵

¹ Cost = three RMB per kg.

² Amdo [A mdo] is the name of a prominent Tibetan region in China, including much of Mtsho sngon.

³ *Amdo Tibet Nomad Life* (2.8 mins, <https://bit.ly/32kt7YR> 31 December 2021).

⁴ Performed by Klu mo rgyal, a well-known A mdo singer. For the song see <https://bit.ly/32Fm8tw> 31 December 2021.

⁵ *A 2500km Trip into Amdo* (1.7 mins, <https://bit.ly/3yFVufX> 31

Nomadic Herding on the Tibetan Plateau,¹ and *Olympus Taiwan - Tibetan Nomads*²). The photo collection videos *Live the Nomad Life in 4K* and *Exploring Nomadic Culture in the Amdo Region of the Tibetan Plateau*³ seem to be advertisements for tourist experiences.

Short documentaries of four to twenty minutes and over twenty minutes feature tourist advertisements and promotional videos focusing on Amdo Tibetan herding life. For example, *Drokpa Nomads - Tibetan Black Tent*,⁴ is 12.48 minutes of a single family's seasonal movement. Activities include folding a black yak-hair tent, packing yaks, driving yaks, unpacking yaks, pitching a black yak-hair tent, making an adobe stove, cutting yak hair, making rope with yak hair, and weaving with yak-hair yarn. This example is representative of several films (*Northern Tibetan Herdsman Life*,⁵ *Tibetan Nomad in Amdo Zorge*,⁶ and *Paul Merton China Tibetan Nomad Life*⁷).

Few films describe Amdo Tibetan herding life in the over twenty-minute slot. One that does is *Nomad Woman's Life in Tibet Drokpa*.⁸ Its forty-eight minutes of herding activities in an Amdo area (the specific location is unidentified) include herding yaks on mountains in chilly weather, collecting yak dung, driving yaks back home in the late afternoon, tethering yaks, collecting frozen yak

December 2021).

¹ *Nomadic Herding on the Tibetan Plateau* (2.20 mins, <https://bit.ly/3mgTMwC> 31 December 2021).

² *Olympus Taiwan – Tibetan Nomads* (2.56 mins, <https://bit.ly/325nvC2> 31 December 2021).

³ *Exploring Nomadic Culture in the Amdo Region of the Tibetan Plateau* (2.47 mins, <https://bit.ly/3pgbtys> 31 December 2021).

⁴ *Drokpa Nomads - Tibetan Black Tent* (12.48 mins, <https://bit.ly/3eaxw3e> 31 December 2021).

⁵ *Northern Tibetan Herdsman Life* (14.53 mins, <https://bit.ly/3sjMThW> 31 December 2021).

⁶ *Tibetan Nomad in Amdo Zorge* (4.49 mins, <https://bit.ly/3mgIGba> 31 December 2021).

⁷ *Paul Merton China Tibetan Nomad Life* (8.05 mins, <https://bit.ly/33zRwdm> 1 December 2021).

⁸ *Nomad Woman's Life in Tibet Drokpa* (48.24 mins, <https://bit.ly/3Fuefpv> 31 December 2021). Drokpa = 'brog pa.

dung, constructing and decorating a yak enclosure, making a dog house with yak dung, making children's toys with yak dung, and fetching water. Two other notable films include *The Woven Tent*¹ and *An Amdo Tibetan Woman's Daily Life (2021)*², documenting authentic pastoral Amdo Tibetan life – not romanticized images of mostly endearing livestock, landscapes, colorful gatherings, and so on.

Gu ru 'phrin las' authentic *Pha sa* and *A Tibetan Herdswoman's Life: 16 Hours in a Day* provide sensitive, respectful insight into contemporary Mgo log generational herders undergoing dramatic social change and environmental challenges in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Gu ru 'phrin las, born and raised locally and familiar with people in the film, has created footage without pretense, without "acting." Viewers encounter footage of real pastoral people and the challenges that they face.

This remarkable work is of great value and will interest all those concerned about the Plateau environment and contemporary Tibetan pastoral life.

APPENDIX: FILMS (all 2 January 2022).

Title	Creator	URL	Mins
<i>A 2500km Trip into Amdo</i>	Le Yu	https://bit.ly/3yFVufX	1.7
<i>A Tibetan Herdswoman's Life: 16 Hours in a Day</i>	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/39JJUff	21
<i>Amdo Tibet Nomad Life</i>	Mystic Tibet Tours	https://bit.ly/32kt7YR	2.8
<i>An Amdo</i>	Klu thar	https://bit.ly/3er2hAU	36.54

¹ *The Woven Tent* (24.20 mins, <https://bit.ly/3puLyTS> 31 December 2021).

² *An Amdo Tibetan Woman's Daily Life (2021)* (36.54 mins, <https://bit.ly/3er2hAU> 31 December 2021).

<i>Tibetan</i>		rgyal		
<i>Woman's Daily</i>				
<i>Life (2021)</i>				
<i>Drokpa</i>		Gordon	https://bit.ly/3eaxw3e	12.48
<i>Nomads</i>	-	Clarke and		
<i>Tibetan Black</i>		Rachael		
<i>Tent</i>		Clarke		
<i>Exploring</i>		Ben	https://bit.ly/3pgbtys	2.47
<i>Nomadic</i>		Cubbage		
<i>Culture in the</i>				
<i>Amdo Region of</i>				
<i>the Tibetan</i>				
<i>Plateau</i>				
Folksong A		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3zM6Pu6	1.21
		'phrin las		
Folksong B		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3mb8IMa	1.41
		'phrin las		
Folksong C		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3CTw8MI	1.16
		'phrin las		
Game A		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3EYRBFJ	7
		'phrin las		
Game B		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3mb96u6	9.52
		'phrin las		
Game C		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3zNQCU	6.47
		'phrin las	U	
<i>Ge</i>	<i>sar</i>	Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3zIgXDT	6.1
<i>Festivities</i>		'phrin las		
<i>Inspiration</i>		Gu ru	https://bit.ly/3oe3MIR	15
		'phrin las		
<i>Nomad</i>		Tibet	https://bit.ly/3Fuefpv	48.2
<i>Woman's Life in</i>		Tuber		4
<i>Tibet Drokpa</i>				
<i>Nomadic</i>		Jackson	https://bit.ly/3mgTMw	2.20
<i>Herding on the</i>		Harvey C		
<i>Tibetan Plateau</i>				

<i>Northern Tibetan Herdsman Life</i>	Jianjiang Wu	https://bit.ly/3sjMThW	14.53
<i>Olympus Taiwan – Tibetan Nomads</i>	Fjavierleo n	https://bit.ly/325nvC2	2.56
Packing a Yak	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3o8LFEE	6.18
<i>Painful Transformation</i>	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3ufqSQo	20.29
<i>Paul Merton China Tibetan Nomad Life</i>	Tibetan Ecology	https://bit.ly/33zRwdm	8.05
<i>Pha sa ཤེས་ཤིག་ [Jeopardy]</i>	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3xybajJ	106
Riddle A	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3kMzDOB	0.39
Riddle B	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3ifvCAB	9.2
Saddling a Horse	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3CRwCTl	2.18
Salting Yaks	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3AQNN6Z	6.26
Story A	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3kNizbn	1.37
Story B	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/2XWCqf5	14.53
Story C	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3zKsOkP	5.17
Story D	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/2XTJ45U	10.10
Story E	Gu ru 'phrin las	https://bit.ly/3osDwL9	4.34

<i>The Woven Tent</i>	Brag mgo ya ma	https://bit.ly/3puLyTS	24.2 0
<i>Tibetan Nomad in Amdo Zorge</i>	Tibetoday	https://bit.ly/3mgIGba	4.49

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TIBETAN TERMS

'grog lam ring mo

འབྲོག་ལམ་རིང་མོ།

chos skyong skyabs

ཆོས་སྐྱོང་སྐྱམས།

dpra khyung dpal bzang

དཔྱ་ཁྱུང་དཔལ་བཟང་།

bcig sgril གཅིག་གྲི།

gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

lan gru ལན་གུ།

mgo log མགོ་ལོག་

mgo nag mi rigs bsten sa

phyugs rigs, phyugs rigs

spu rigs bsten sa rtswa

rigs མགོ་ནག་མི་རིགས་བསྐྱེན་ས་ཕུགས་རིགས།

ཕུགས་རིགས་ཐུ་རིགས་བསྐྱེན་ས་རྩ་རིགས།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

pha sa ཕ་ས།

rnga ba ར་བ།

sgo med སྐོ་མེད།

smin thang སྐོན་ཐང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Guoluo 果洛

Jiuzhi 久治

Lanzhou 兰州

Mentang 门堂

Minzu 民族

Qinghai 青海

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW: *LAST MEMORIES - A MDO TIBETAN TRIBAL LIVES: RDOR JAG AND THANG TA* BY
KLU THAR RGYAL ET AL.

Reviewed by Kelsang Norbu (Gesangnuobu 格桑诺布,
Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ)*



Klu thar rgyal with CK Stuart and Sami Honkasala. 2021. *Last Memories-Amdo Tibetan Tribal Lives: Rdor jag and Thang ta*. 43 mostly color figures. 228pp. <https://bit.ly/3XEwySC>, 7 July 2023. (3rd edition)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Last Memories is the life accounts of two ordinary Tibetan individuals from a once-remote community in today's Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province in northwest PR China. Having lived during a critical historical period of social and political turmoil, experienced great changes in their lives, and witnessed the local historical transformation, these eyewitness accounts constitute a rich oral history of their home community. Supplemental materials give readers a more complete understanding of where and how the interviewees lived. These include maps identifying the community locations and sites of major events; lists of people, places, and Tibetan terms (IPA plus colloquial and Tibetan literary equivalents) for local livestock in the Appendix (herding culture); and photos of relevant figures, landscapes, houses, monasteries, local daily life, ceremonies and celebrations, food, and various objects. The author provides a list of materials for further reading in the Appendix, surely of interest to those who wish to explore Mang ra County history further.

* Kelsang Norbu. 2023. Review *Last Memories - A mdo Tibetan Tribal Lives: Rdor jag and Thang ta* by Klu thar rgyal et al. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:427-441.

In *Last Memories*, Klu thar rgyal presents extraordinary life narratives of two "ordinary" individuals, the author's maternal grandfather, Bu lo (1929-2021, hereafter, Lo), and his maternal great-aunt, Lcags mo byams (b. 1940, Lo's wife's sister). His close relationship with both elders allowed him to explain aspects of their lives that would otherwise remain unknown.

Thanks to their advanced ages, *Last Memories* covers almost an entire century, including common life stories, e.g., childhood, dating, marriages, livestock herding, childcare, religious practices, banditry, revenge, conflicts with contemporary authorities over taxes, exile in other regions, and social unrest in the 1950s and later. These vivid firsthand accounts provide valuable materials in the fields of history, ethnography, social-political structures, economic transitions, Qinghai-Gansu and China history, and Tibetology.

The time this oral history encompasses is critical in China's contemporary history, particularly in the regions where the individuals in *Last Memories* have lived. 1949 was a turning point in the history of modern China, marking the start of a newly established political system - Communist China. Earlier, the family of Ma Bufang (1903-1975) controlled today's Qinghai Province for some four decades. Ma was notorious for brutally exploiting and oppressing locals causing massive suffering to ethnic Tibetans and other minorities in Qinghai and leaving unerasable scars in the memories of local people.¹

¹ Chen (2007) writes that Ma subjugated Bla brang Monastery twice, burned Gser lag (Sailihai) Monastery, suppressed Mgo log (Guoluo) seven times, killed Yul shul (Yushu) people, and crushed Reb gong (Tongren) tribes in the courses of multiple appalling massacres (210-230). Hundreds of locals from my natal home area fled to the Blab rang area during those troubled times to evade excessive taxation and military conscription under Ma's brutal rule. The author might have provided more information about Ma Bufang and A pa a lo, rulers of Qinghai and Bla brang areas, respectively, during the Guomindang (GMD) government (1919-1949). See Chen (2007), Fan (2014), and Cui et al. (2017) for more on Ma Bufang. A pa a lo's background is available in his autobiography (Huang 1989). Ma and A pa a lo, and their fathers, were rulers of their respective regions in northwest China during the Republic of China (1912-1949) period. The former's family ruled Qinghai Province,

Local Tibetans were eager for a better new era with the collapse of the Ma regime. However, unrest from the 1950s till the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976-1977) brought nationwide tragedy to China's citizens that Tibetans living in remote highland areas did not escape.

While historians have described certain aspects of major issues, such as political system changes in the region in the late 1940s, the Cultural Revolution, and powerful historical figures such as Ma Bufang, much less attention has been given to the lives of ordinary individuals living in remote communities on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. This further highlights the value of numerous social, political, and economic details that emerge in retelling two individuals' experiences during this period.

PART ONE: LO

The author chronologically presents the narrators' memories in two sections. Lo's life starts with birth in the local tribal leader's home in Tsha nag Community in 1929. Details of obligatory and frequent bandit raids by young men to demonstrate manhood and bravery are given, along with descriptions of the living situation of tent-living nomads. Such banditry traditions as when to start an attack, where to go, where not to go, and norms during a raid reveal social order (or its absence) are recounted in vivid detail. Lo describes conflicts between communities and local "heroes" and subsequent revenge killings at a time when banditry among community men was common.

and the latter controlled the Bla brang area of Gansu Province. Ma expanded his control with military attacks, threatening A pa a lo. Ma Bufang fled abroad with the establishment of the PRC in 1949, while A pa a lo stayed and cooperated with the new government in positions that included the vice governor of Gansu Province and the governor of Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Consequently, Ma's contemporary Chinese official representation is that of a notorious anti-Communist and government warlord while A pa a lo is presented as a patriot.

¹ A pa a lo.

Lo also describes spirit mediums and divinations that were important in local life. Divinations by women are rare in many Tibetan communities, highlighting the value of two introduced divinations by women: (1) examining cracks in wheat figures resembling birds cooked in ash and 2) sheep dung pellets. These divination accounts illustrate the worry women at home had for their husbands and children for their fathers on dangerous bandit raids:

When cracks ran from the bottom to the ear, it meant that her husband had received the message she had sent through the bird-bread, indicating that he was safe, regardless of where he was.

As the woman was divining, her children surrounded her, eager for good news. When they found cracks to the ear of the bird, they happily examined it again and again and shouted, "Father is returning!" They kept it for a while and then competed to eat the auspicious bread bird (76).

Lo gives detailed accounts of local conditions, such as walking barefoot (shoes were rare), clothing, and ornaments. He encounters superpower manifestations rivaling those of magic realism. A tantric practitioner possessing *gnyan* 'power from a class of powerful deities capable of harming people if offended' protects a family's or a community's livestock. Lo was skeptical but later was convinced when his father suffered from such an experience. This belief was strengthened when Lo and his associates went on a failed bandit raid and witnessed firsthand such spiritual power when the bandits' family tried to steal yaks and chanted *tantra* spells, successfully protecting their livestock.

Another example of a valuable firsthand historical reference is Lo's account of the warlord Ma Bufang's troops:

...cavalrymen with guns and swords came to my home and forced us to collect taxes from our little Rdor jag Tribe. As the family of the tribal leader, we had to collect taxes from tribal members. I don't recall them doing anything for us except collecting taxes. We had to pay taxes on mdzo, horses, yaks, sheep, livestock skin, leather, wool, lambskin, and the cash we had on hand (82-83).

Of added historical value related to Ma Bufang is Lo's narrative of Tsha nag tribal men killing Ma's tax collectors. The tribal head visits Ma Bufang in person with the corpses of Ma's soldiers on mules to plead for forgiveness to protect his tribe at the risk of losing his head:

Ma Bufang listened, laughed loudly, and said, "Tsha nag leader! It's not a problem to cut off your heads. You are a leader with a low position. But you will be tortured before I cut off your head!"

"Sure, we're ready for that, but after our heads are cut off, please don't do anything to members of our Tsha nag home community," Dpal Idan said.

"I don't care much about that, but we will surely cut off your heads," Ma said.

"Please do whatever you like, but please think wisely before you cut off our heads."

"Why should I care much about that? I've beheaded many people," said Ma.

"You need to think carefully. The leader of the Bla brang area, Bla dpon a blo,¹ is my community's sworn friend, and the leader of the Nag chu area, Grags pa rgyal mtshan, is also my community's close sworn friend. Both will get involved if you cut off my head," Dpal Idan said.

Ma Bufang suddenly changed his mind and said, "Haha! I don't need your heads. I can't eat them nor wear them, but I need *mda'mo stong gis bshag dgos* (half of a family's property in compensation)" (110).

Stag 'bum rgyal's *Degeneration* (2012) depicts relationships (both peaceful and fierce) among three Tibetan tribes and their conflict with Ma Bufang's troops due to heavy taxation. A storyline featuring a tribal leader visiting Ma's headquarters in Khri ka (Guide) to settle disputes is nearly identical to Lo's account but has very different consequences.

In describing the tension between the warlord and the tribe, boundaries of political power and social structure, such as sworn friends who were strategic allies between communities, come into play as the tribal leader promises to pay Ma compensation but flees

¹ A pa a lo.

the area with his subordinate families. A new challenge to survive emerges with conflict with other tribes, and many of the livestock belonging to Lo's group die from disease, forcing a return to their homeland. These informative narratives provide historians with rich firsthand materials they would find nowhere else.

Lo also discusses pikas and marmots, hinting at the complex relationship between herders and wildlife. Children growing up on the grassland tried to kill pika or marmot for fun and meat while their parents scolded them for taking life. Fat marmot flesh was particularly valuable as a dietary supplement during famine.

Lo also reveals many details of his private life, including dating, revenge, and two marriages, providing more information on social structure and local traditions.

Lo's accounts end by leaving untouched critical events that occurred afterward, such as social unrest in 1958, famine in the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, and later political reforms, opening up, and improvement of community livelihood.

PART TWO: LCAGS MO BYAMS

Lcags mo byams' memories begin with the community members returning home from exile. The earliest thing she could remember was living in their native place in the 1940s. Her narrations focus on family, marriage, children, and women, providing an excellent supplement to Lo's accounts.

Lcags mo byams' life account starts with the tragic death of her father and brother, who died in the same year when she was eleven. She lived with her mother and a neighbor widow after returning from exile. She also describes the first marriage of her oldest sister, Gcod pa thar (1933), who attempted suicide by jumping off a cliff because she was so unhappy in her first marriage. Gcog pa thar would eventually become Lo's second wife:

Our parents would not agree to the divorce Gcod pa thar wanted [with her first husband]. She herded her husband's sheep almost every day and drove the sheep up on the mountain near our parents' camp. She would then visit our home. Father always kicked her out of the tent immediately and sent her back to her husband's

sheep. However, she would follow Father back home and wouldn't leave until he angrily beat and scolded her some more. Eventually, she would leave but look back sadly at our tent after washing her tearful face at the stream just below our camp. Even though our parents always sent her back to her husband's tent, she continued to come to our parents' tent whenever she was herding her husband's sheep (151).

Lcags mo byams' sister married a man from a wealthy family with over one hundred yaks and 500 sheep:

Everyone thought she was lucky, but she told me she had to get up early every morning and, together with a little girl, milk thirty yaks and churn the milk. She got up so early that she milked under the moonlight.

She said, "When there is no light from the moon, it is so dark that we guess the location of each milk yak. Regardless of the weather, we must get up at the same time and stick our warm bare feet into the cold-muddy area where the milk yaks are tied and where the ground is wet with yak urine or rain. The bones of our feet become ice cold as we milk with our head against a warm yak."

They milked under sparkling stars. She once went to sleep while she was milking. Fortunately, no one noticed. After driving the yaks to the mountains, they collected yak dung and carried it to their tent in a basket, which was heavier than a full water bucket (154).

Lcags mo byams further describes her marriage:

When I was fifteen, I was engaged to Rgya mtsho, the nephew of my adoptive mother's husband and Sha bo. I almost fainted when I heard that he was going to be my husband. I cried. He was ten years older than me. I said it was impossible and constantly sobbed to show my unhappiness. Chos lo reported how I felt and said she was worried about me and couldn't bear to see me so upset (155).

Her graphic commentary on the status of women in her youth includes details of illness and treatments from monks and tantric practitioners.

Major unrest in many Tibetan areas in 1958 was followed by "reforms," starvation, and the Cultural Revolution. Religious

practice was forbidden, community class struggles were carried out, and people worked in communal teams. Lcags mo byams notes:

Many rumors about the new government's army circulated just before a period of chaos in 1958. Locals often consulted Rdor jag Lha pa, who claimed that there was no need to worry, it was a brief storm, and people would soon see the blue sky and warm sun again. Locals felt relieved when they heard this (162).

Despite the tantric practitioner's positive prediction, Lcags mo byams recalls:

Rdor jag Lha pa's family was initially not required to farm. Instead, they were assigned to herd communal livestock because they had stayed behind while other locals had fled when soldiers came in 1958. People admired those who did light work, such as herding. Most locals had to do heavy work such as plowing grassland but received poor food.

However, Rdor jag Lha pa was soon accused of being a religious practitioner, and all of his family members were ordered to farm. Rdor jag Lha pa was told he would be publicly criticized the next day. He died after bellowing as loud as thunder that night. Locals thought this meant he was a great man because he had passed away before local women leaders humiliated him in public. Rdor jag Lha pa was special because he avoided women's punishment, which many *bla ma* experienced.

Rdor jag Lha pa's wife survived starvation and communal work and grew very old (162-163).

Lcags mo byams further authenticates living situations during different periods with her most recent story about Gcod pa thar giving birth to her last child at forty-three in the last year of the Cultural Revolution (1976).

DISCUSSION

The conception of "oral history" has evolved. Summerfield quotes Ronald Grele's definition in 1973 as "the interviewing of eyewitness participants in the events of the past for purposes of historical reconstruction" (2016:1). Consequently, "interviewing" is "eye

witness participants" providing the source of information and "historical reconstruction" is the purpose of oral history.

Oral history reliability has been criticized due to the fallibility of interviewees' memory and how accurately they represent the wider population. Scholars debate memory, narrative, subjectivity, value, and validity of oral evidence. Defenders of oral history maintain that despite constraints, "oral resources do not have a monopoly of such problems" (Summerfield 2016:3), and Portelli points out:

Oral sources are credible but with a different credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources (1998:68).

Summerfield writes:

Oral history today is less a quest for objective eyewitness accounts in which the narrator provides the historian with data for interpretation, and more a means to engage with experience, subjectivity, and historical imagination. ... Oral history is used as a research method in different ways and with varying emphases on "data" and "text" by a wide range of disciplines within academia and by a huge variety of organizations outside, from schools and community groups to voluntary organizations and hospitals (Summerfield 2016:1).

Oral history theorists and practitioners work to provide practical guidelines for oral history work: preparation for the interviewing project, interviewing methodology, data analysis and interpretation, legalities and ethics of oral history work, and transcription of oral history accounts (Perks and Thomson 1998; Yow 2005).

Having reviewed some basic theoretical criteria for oral history, we now turn to Klu thar rgyal's work and how he chose the subject and interviewees, conducted interviews, and transcribed the oral sources, thus significantly contributing to local history with the assistance of the other authors.

Writing oral history requires an author to have knowledge of the topic and be equipped to deal with inevitable challenges that arise. In choosing topics, interviewees, and intentions, the author writes:

...motivated by reading oral history accounts in *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, I spent time in 2016 and 2017 listening and learning more about Lo's long, extraordinary life, and the life of his second wife, my grandmother, Gcod pa thar, and the life and times of her sister, Lcags mo byams (29).

The author clearly intends to record the life histories of the mentioned two individuals (rather than particular historical events or a specific time frame of a regional history), who happened to be his relatives, which provides important advantages.

Lo's life story from childhood in the 1930s and ending in the 1950s includes descriptions of contemporary community life and important regional historical events, particularly by the Ma family. Approximately two-thirds of Lo's life remains untold.

Lcags mo byams' life story covers three decades from her childhood in the 1940s to the 1970s, leaving more than half of her life blank. Photos of the two interviewees' late life situations and brief sections describing their "current life" are provided.

The special relationship (relatives) and trust between the interviewer and interviewees suggests the interviews were conducted in an intimate, informal atmosphere, but there were challenges. When the author first approached Lo, he was met with: "Your questions remind me of the time I was detained, and soldiers asked what I had done each year since I was eight years old. I was told to confess everything" (33). The interviewer adjusted his approach promptly, clearing an unexpected interview obstacle.

Lo was reluctant to talk about his deceased wife, so the author wisely interviewed his maternal grandmother's sister, Lcags mo byams. These situations involve complex cultural and ethical issues that might negatively affect the interviews if inappropriately handled. Close association and mutual trust are great gifts during interviews, exemplified by the author obtaining information from other relatives to fill in missing information and cross-check the

accuracy of the information he obtained from the two main informants.

As eyewitnesses to events, an interviewee's testimonies are the backbone of creating oral history. What the interviewee told, or left untold, is essential. The theoretical development of oral history has shifted from the earlier stage of being "preoccupied with the accuracy of the information that interviewees provided and the reliability of memory" towards a "greater interest in the narratives people compose about the past and how memory is socially, culturally and psychically constructed," or "a shift from concern with data to concern with text (Summerfield:1-2).

This does not exclude the accuracy of an informant's information from examination. Lo's memory of people, places, and times of events was "phenomenal." Klu thar rgyal claims to have interviewed other relevant individuals, keenly listened to conversations between interviewees and others, asked questions seeking clarification, and visited places mentioned in the narrations to cross-check information his informants provided. Such efforts certainly increase the information's accuracy and credibility.

Yet, due to cultural constraints, personal memory limits, or the relationship between the two factors, subjectivity is the main feature of a personal account, which should not be judged solely by the accuracy of the data. Subjectivity characterizes an oral history's formulation.

How should collected oral resources be represented? Writing an oral history accurately is tedious and made more so by writing in a foreign language. Samuel describes certain challenges in oral history transcription:

The spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page. Some distortion is bound to arise, whatever the intention of the writer, simply by cutting out pauses and repetitions.....A much more serious distortion arises when the spoken word is boxed into the categories of written prose.....Continuity, and the effort to impose it even when it violates the twists and turns of speech, is another insidious influence.....The decadence of transcription may become extreme if the writer, not content with mutilating a text,

by cuts and rearrangements, then attempts to weave it together again with interpolated words of his own (1998:389).

In working to make his oral history as close to the original accounts as possible, Klu thar rgyal assembled inter-connected narratives into categories based on content, arranged them chronologically, and listened to them multiple times, which the narratives' chronological flow attests.

The author's generous use of photos, maps, charts, footnotes, livestock names, and Tibetan and Chinese terms in the text at the end significantly adds to the book's value.

Thompson suggests (which I paraphrase) the importance of oral history's value and impact:

In all these fields of history, by introducing new evidence from the underside, shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, challenging historians' assumptions and accepted judgments, and bringing recognition to ignored people, a cumulative process of transformation is set in motion. This enlarges and enriches the scope of historical writing, changes its social message, and makes history more democratic (1998: 26).

A particular value of this oral history is modeling social and historical realities of regional communities at particular times via ordinary community members' accounts. This recognizes and values local knowledge, empowering the collective/community members otherwise ignored by historians. Thus, grassroots knowledge becomes essential to macro-level history creation.

Another significance of this book's contributions is the application of oral history research methodology to studies of Tibetan regions. Many researchers of Tibetan regions' history focus on written achievements. In contrast, *Last Memories* is an innovative approach to extending history beyond simply recording the memories of two individuals.

An oral history not only accurately records interviewees' accounts but is also expected to provide sufficient supplementary materials to verify informants' accounts, especially historical figures and events previously studied by scholars.

As mentioned earlier, missing parts of the interviewees' life stories, especially their perspectives on important issues and events, would make this oral history more complete. Another oral history from the same region may serve as a comparison. Nangchukja's (2015) detailed life history of a woman who was an eyewitness to important events in contemporary China organized in sections subtitled "1958:Chaos," "the Great Famine," and "the Cultural Revolution" in chronological order. Local official documents related to the event as supplemental information are cited. Nangchukja explains the value of the oral history he recorded:

Her life is just one example of the rich knowledge and experiences that contemporary Tibetan elders possess, a knowledge which is going largely unrecorded and unarchived and may be lost to the future were it not for concerted effort (2015:254).

CONCLUSION

Last Memories provides firsthand materials of a Tibetan community in the pre-1958 era based on two ordinary individuals' extraordinary experiences. This innovative treatment of local oral history features is important given that the number of Tibetans who experienced this period and can provide details of intimate lived experiences is rapidly diminishing. The community's social structure is better understood because it is built on the tumultuous series of events and rich ethnographical materials in the interviewees' accounts. *Last Memories* is an example of a social and historical study that was possible in the early 2020s based on individual lives providing an important contribution to a more inclusive historical picture of ethnic minority communities living in remote regions often overlooked by historians.

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TIBETAN TERMS

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།
 bla brang བླ་བརྟ།
 bla dpon a blo བླ་དོན་ཨ་ལོ།
 bla ma བླ་མ།
 bu lo ཐུ་ལོ།
 chos lo ཆོས་ལོ།
 dpal ldan དཔལ་ལྷན།
 gcod pa thar གཅོད་པ་ཐར།
 gnyan གཉན།
 grags pa rgyal mtshan
 གྲགས་པ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
 gser lag གསེར་ལག།
 kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།
 khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།
 klu thar rgyal ལྷ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།
 lcags mo byams ལྷགས་མ་བྱམས།
 mang ra མང་ར།
 mda'mo stong gis bshag dgos
 མདའ་མོ་སྟོང་གིས་བཤག་དགོས།
 mdzo མཛོ།
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྟོན།
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།
 nag chu ནག་ཆུ།
 Nangchukja, snying lcags

rgyal རྒྱལ་ལྷགས་རྒྱལ།
 o rgyan ཨོ་རྒྱལ།
 rdor jag lha pa རྫོང་གཤམ་ལ།
 reb gong རེབ་གོང་།
 rgya mtsho རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 sha bo ཤ་བོ།
 thang nag ཐང་ནག།
 tsha nag ཐཛ་ནག།
 yul shul རྩལ་ཤུ།

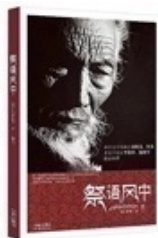
CHINESE TERMS

Gannan 甘南
 Gansu 甘肃
 Gesangnuobu 格桑诺布
 Guomindang 国民党
 Guide 贵德
 Guinan 贵南
 Hainan 海南
 Hainan zangzu zizhizhou
 海南藏族自治州
 Ma Bufang 马步芳
 Qinghai 青海
 Sailihai 赛力亥
 Yushu 玉树

REVIEW: *PRAYERS IN THE WIND* BY TSHE RING

NOR BU ཚེ་རིང་ནོར་བུ། (CIREN LUOBU 次仁罗布)

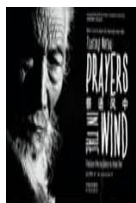
Reviewed by Pad+ma rig 'dzin བཟླ་རིག་འཛིན། (Wanmerenzeng 完么仁增)*



Ciren Luobu 次仁罗布. 2015. *Jiyu Fengzhong* 祭语风中 [*Prayers in the Wind*]. Beijing 北京: Zhongyi Chubanshe 中译出版社 [Chinese Translation Press]. 442 pp. ISBN 978-7-4225-6 (paperback 39.8RMB).



Tshe ring nor bu ཚེ་རིང་ནོར་བུ། (Blo brtan ལྷོ་བརྟན།, translator). 2018. *Rlung khrod kyi mchod sbyin* ལྷུང་ཁྲོད་ཀྱི་མཚན་བྱིན། [*Prayers in the Wind*]. Lha sa ལྷ་ས།: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang བོད་རྒྱུ་མཚན་བོད་ཡིག་འཛིན་པའི་ཆུང་ལུང་། [Tibetan Ancient Books Press]. 561 pp. ISBN 978-7-5700-0110-1 (paperback 68RMB).



Tsering Norbu (Joshua Dyer, translator; Bruce Humes, copyeditor). 2019. *Prayers in the Wind*. [*Rlung khrod kyi mchod sbyin* ལྷུང་ཁྲོད་ཀྱི་མཚན་བྱིན།]. Beijing 北京: Zhongyi Chubanshe 中译出版社 [Chinese Translation Press]. 586 pp. ISBN 978-7-5001-9 (paperback 169RMB); Amazon World Copyrights Publishing Group Inc., ASINBo8V1HC6ZJ (Kindle Edition USD9.99).

The front page of the English translation of *Prayers in the Wind* notes: "...Tibetan writer Tsering Norbu [Tshe ring nor bu] has been featuring [sic] on China's 'Best Novel' and 'Best Short Story' charts since 2006." Born in Lha sa in 1965, the author was educated locally, graduating in 1986 from Tibet University with a BA in Tibetan literature. He subsequently taught Tibetan at a senior middle school in Chab mdo (Changdu) City for two years and later worked at the

* Pad+ma rig 'dzin (Wanmerenzeng). 2023. Review: *Prayers in the Wind* by Tshe ring nor bu (Ciren Luobu). *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:442-456.

Post and Telecommunication School of Tibet. In 1989, his job was transferred to Sne mo (Nimu) County. His Chinese-language novel, *The Ferryman of Nor rtse*, was published in *Tibetan Literature* in 1992, receiving positive comments from the editor, Li Jiajun.¹ Earlier, several of his short stories, prose compositions, and poems were published in Tibetan magazines such as *Tibetan Youth* and *Lha sa Evening Paper*.²

While an editor for the *Tibet Daily* in 2004, he received an opportunity to attend the Lu Xun Literature Academy for literary skill training. In late 2005, his job was transferred to the Tibetan Literature Association, where he furthered his literature creation endeavors. His short story, *Killer*, was included in China's Novel Charts in 2006, listed in Xiaoshuo Xuankan 'Selected Stories' Quadrennial National Excellent Stories, and included in *21 Shiji Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxue* '21st Century Chinese Literature'. *Killer* also won a Gold Award of the 5th Qomolangma Literature and Art Award. Later, Tibetan auteur, Pad ma tshe brtan (Pema Tsedan), adapted *Killer* in his film, *Jinpa* (2018; see FT³ 2).

His mid-length novel, *Realm*, was published in the second issue of *National Literature* in 2007, winning the 5th Tibet New Century Literary Award in 2008, and translated into English by Krysta Close and Dong Rui ('Brug mo skyid 2019:532). *The Released Sheep* and *America* were published in the 4th issue of the Chinese magazine, *Fangcao* 'Fragrant Grass', in 2009. The former was included in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 'Fiction Monthly' and listed in the charts of China's Latest Contemporary Fiction in 2009, translated into Korean, and won the 5th Lu Xun Literature Prize in 2009, while *America* was selected for inclusion in both *China's 2009 Short Story Collection* (2009 Nian Zhongguo Duanpian Xiaoshuoji) and *2009 China's Best Short Stories. Possession*, a short story, won the National Literature Award in 2011.⁴

¹ <https://bit.ly/3EuNwZG> 19 September 2021 provides a more complete Tibetan-language introduction.

² <https://bit.ly/3omPaXl> 5 December 2021 introduces the author.

³ Here and later, "FT" indicates "footnote."

⁴ <https://bit.ly/3EydzPC> 19 September 2021 provides a detailed introduction.

'Brug mo skyid reports: "Currently, Ciren Luobu [Tshe ring nor bu] is Executive Chief Editor of *Tibetan Literature*, a member of the China Writers Association Committee, and Vice-Chair of the Tibet Writers Association" (2019:532).

Prayers in the Wind was published in the third issue of *Fangcao* in 2015. After its release by the Chinese Translation Press in August 2015, there was a noteworthy reaction in the field of Chinese Literature (Hu and Ciren Luobu 2016:117).

In an interview on the media platform, Mi chung kha bde 'The Voluble Little Man',¹ the author notes that his new novel, *Wusizang* [*Dbus gtsang*] 'Central Tibet', will soon be released and adds that *Prayers in the Wind* has been translated into Kazakh and *The Released Sheep* has been translated into Hungarian.

...

Tshe ring nor bu mainly employs the first-person to narrate the difficult life experiences of the protagonist, 'Jig med dbang grags, in the 1950s-1960s. The author occasionally inserts an omniscient point of view to provide panoramic life scenes. For his multiple combinations of points of view, Liu (2016:196) notes:

第二人称叙述，明显具有反常规阅读经验，又具有类似喜剧中的"第四堵墙"的效应，意味着观众称为叙事的参与者，接受了参与叙述的行为。

The second-person narrative is an apparent abnormal reading experience but has a similar effect of 'breaking the fourth wall'² in theatre, allowing readers to participate in the narrative acts (my translation).

Moreover, Zhou (2017:109) comments that multiple layers of the spatial narrative of *Prayers in the Wind* differ from the temporal patterns required by the grand narrative this novel employs.

...

This book consists of two parts. Part One has twelve chapters, and

¹ See <https://bit.ly/3Kjb5Yq> 18 January 2022 or the video interview.

² "...an invisible barrier known in literature as the fourth wall – the barrier between the characters and the audience" (<https://bit.ly/3pGrsoz> 3 December 2021).

Part Two has ten chapters. The story begins near a sky burial platform, where the main protagonist is visited by Zhi 'od kun dga' nyi ma, a reincarnate *bla ma*, whose former life was 'Jig med dbang grags' tutor. Zhi 'od kun dga' nyi ma struggles to comprehend the life experience of his previous incarnation and the protagonist through a few hours of interview with the main character, 'Jig med dbang grags, who passes away in the first chapter of Part One after meeting his tutor's reincarnation and asking the young reincarnated *bla ma* to perform *pho ba* 'rituals to achieve rebirth in a buddha realm' during his final moments.

Tshe ring nor bu aptly describes the *pho ba* experienced - one was performing as the other moved into a state of unconsciousness, making the first chapter of Part One both the start and end of the story.

Part One's 'Chapter Two' focuses on the protagonist's life history with occasional comments from the interviewer. During the period of chaos, the People's Liberation Army moved to Lha sa, where Tibetan elites, commoners, and monks fled to India from their homeland. 'Jig med dbang grags, his tutor, and two other monk pupils (Lho brag nor bzang and Rdo rje gyal mtshan) opted to follow after consulting the tutor's *yi dam* 'tutelary deity'.

As they trek to India, they visit one of the tutor's patrons at his manor. The young master, Ser tang, and his daughter, Lady Gser thang, live a tranquil life in stark contrast to the chaos in Lha sa City. The narrator comments, "Time stood still at Sertang Manor. It was a utopia that existed apart from the tumultuous world we were living in" (English version:81).

Education and travel abroad led the young master of Gser tang Manor to embrace modern ideas, including democracy, the Western political system, and modern technology. At his manor, Gser thang Master and his steward sip brandy and other drinks in various shaped glasses during a banquet to host Zhi 'od kun dga' nyi ma and his pupils. Young Master's daughter and her friends ride British bicycles. Meanwhile, Ser tang Master has reduced taxes on his serfs, given house servants some of his family-owned fields, and bought metal plows to ease laborers' work.

Young Master enthusiastically hoped for social changes leading to equality among all people. Common laborers would become independent and no longer enslaved people. He praised Chairman Mao in his poems as a bright warm sun bringing glory, happiness, and wealth to Snow Land people. He earnestly believed it was a perfect time for ordinary Tibetans, even though his family's property was confiscated; his father was forced to do construction labor; Young Master himself was dismissed from his editor job and forced to confess exploitations he committed in previous times; and he and Lady Gser thang were forced to wear hats of humiliation, brought before crowds, and criticized. The narrator describes this mortifying scene:

...A paper hat scrawled with slogans was perched on her [Lady Sertang's] head. "Overthrow the Ox-ghosts and Snake-demons! Overthrow the anti-Revolutionaries!" Around her neck hung a garland of old Tibetan money and a plaque with her name on it... Master Sertang appeared at the end of the procession beating a pair of cymbals as he walked. They [the Red Guards] had dressed him in a brocade gown and a paper hat like the one Lady Sertang [Gser thang] wore... a list of crimes was hung around his neck... (English version:467).

Because of her father's aristocratic identity, his daughter was not allowed to participate in dancing, singing, and stage plays that now focused on political propaganda. Later, she desperately cut relations with her father and married a physically unattractive working-class man, thus avoiding additional criticism and earning a secure job. However, when the narrator later met her, she was divorced and planning to go aboard where her sister worked.

When Liu (2016) read Young Master's poems praising Mao and the Communist Party, he recalled historical Chinese poets who praised Mao:

文学的存在状况难以一语说清，时代的谎言就是如此，而写下这类诗歌的主人的命运几起几伏，跌宕不已，我们无法区分现实还是文学，历史的文本和想象的文学聚在同一时空，是特殊时代的特殊产物，也是特殊意境中特殊表现形式，具有极强的寓言色彩和反讽意味。

It is challenging to present the existence of literature, the absurdity of an era, and the travails of those who composed these poems - we cannot discern if it is reality or fiction. When historical text and fiction are combined in a single unity of space and time, it could be understood as a special production of a special era... intensely colored by fable and irony (Liu 2016:199).

Divination and oracles have played a vital role in Tibetan society, especially during times of crisis, justifying a close examination of the motivation behind the human flight portrayed in *Prayers in the Wind*. For example, a prominent Tibetan leader consulted a Buddhist oracle when he was about to leave Tibet. Similarly, the narrator and his *bla ma* consulted his teacher's *yi dam* when the political situation in Lha sa worsened.

The author emphasized in an interview that *Prayers in the Wind* is not an intentional presentation of Tibetan culture but rather authentic Tibetan daily life (Hu and Ciren Luobu 2016:121).¹

The monk refugees continue toward the Indian border after several days at Gser thang Manor. They were stopped by Tibetan soldiers on a steep mountainside and forced to hand over their only horse and baggage on a steep mountainside. Lho brag nor bzang does not quickly give the package on his back to a soldier, who grabs and pulls it, sending a candy tin to the ground that opens, spilling jewels. Rdo rje rgya mtshan rushes over and strikes the soldier. Irritated, the soldier kicks him in the chest, sending him tumbling down the steep mountain to his death.

After the monk's death, the *bla ma* decides to meditate in a mountain cave near a monastery and orders the two pupils to return to their Lha sa monastery, which they do, though the narrator is reluctant to leave his *bla ma*. As they return, the narrator

¹ Cabezón observes that close observation of Tibetans in their daily life reveals that many engage in various religious activities:

If you live near a monastery, chances are that you will awaken to the sound of a gong calling monks to their morning prayer assembly or *tsog* (*tshogs*). Even if you live far from a monastery, you may well be roused from sleep by the high-pitched clanging of someone ringing a ritual bell, or by the soft murmur of neighbors reciting *khandön* (*kha 'don*), their daily ritual commitments... (2010:01).

and Lho brag nor bzang are apprehended by Chinese soldiers and taken to Lha sa in an old truck full of captured Tibetan soldiers and refugees. In Lha sa, the narrator and Lho brag nor bzang are separated and assigned tasks in different work units.

Upon his release some months later, the narrator goes to his father's house, hoping to find his father and brother, but the house is locked, and neighbors do not know their whereabouts. He then walks to his monastery with *tshwa tshwa* 'miniature clay stupas' made from some of the deceased monk's remains and places them on a hill behind the monastery.

Most monks left the monastery, joining groups to learn new policies established by the Communist Party. Other monks became laymen. Only a few aged monks pray, debate, and chant at the monastery. The narrator stays in his monastery room till he has no more food, then goes to Lha sa City, where he is classified as a proletariat by Communist officers and assigned a job registering residents.

At the beginning of Part Two, soldiers are recruited from Lha sa residents to support the battlefield at the Indian border. The narrator also joins, which allows him to visit his teacher in the mountain cave, but he learns he has passed away.

After cremating his teacher's corpse, he finds relics among the ashes. He returns home with his teacher's prayer beads and some relics¹ he wants to share with Lho brag nor bzang, who has become a layman. His friend's uncle, now an ardent supporter of Communism, scolds the narrator, warning him not to involve Lho brag nor bzang in superstitious activity.

The narrator experiences an assortment of sad things late in the novel. He becomes a layman and marries a widow whose husband, a mule driver between India and Tibet, died in the conflict between Tibetan and Chinese soldiers. Later, Communist activists led the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in Lha sa City, encouraging the desecration and destruction of anything related to religion, including Buddha images, dharma protectors, Buddhist scripts, and various items in the Jo kang Temple.

¹ See Martin (1994) for a detailed description of Tibetan relics.

Witnessing this madness and desecrations of monasteries, an old woman fell ill and died in the narrator's neighborhood. Her only daughter was busy at the Indian border with her Chinese general husband, so only the narrator could arrange the funeral and care for her very young nephew.

A feature of *Prayers in the Wind* during this chaotic period that resonates with readers from Tibetan areas is its polyphonic narrative. Mi la ras pa¹ was a spiritual guide for both Zhi 'od kun kga' nyi ma and his pupil, the narrator, who were tightly linked by invisible and powerful spiritual beliefs. They firmly believed in an achievable mental state allowing perception of the ultimate truth of reality, liberation, and a peaceful mind. Tibetans were anguished when Red Guards² desecrated monasteries, Buddhist images, texts, and the enshrined body of Tsong kha pa.

During the Cultural Revolution, metal images from Tibetan altars were taken to the Bureau of Commencement as scrap metal, and Red Guards ordered plaster deity images tossed into the streets. The narrator was criticized for concealing his *bla ma*'s deity images and prayer beads. Protecting such images irritated zealots, and, as punishment, the narrator's family was banished to a rural farm to herd communal livestock. The narrator is fond of this remote area's peaceful tranquility and freedom and does not complain. However, the narrator and his wife's relationship deteriorates once they leave the city. Shoved by a Red Guard when she attempts to prevent her husband from being taken from their home, she suffers a miscarriage. When the narrator returns, his wife is livid and exclaims, "You killed him [the infant]!" (English version:534).

Their relationship beyond restoration, the wife develops a secret relationship with a farm manager, becomes pregnant, and

¹ Mi la ras pa (1040–1123), a highly revered Tibetan yogin, famed for his austere hermetic lifestyle and the Tantric instructions he gave through songs of realization.

² Militant high school and university students placed in paramilitary units during the Cultural Revolution under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party to assist Chairman Mao deal with Party leaders who were not sufficiently revolutionary. Often wearing green jackets similar to Chinese soldier uniforms at the time, red armbands were worn on one sleeve.

dies during childbirth. The baby survived and was raised by the narrator.

Years later, the narrator was allowed to live in Lha sa City and, when he was an older man, decided to live near the Pha bong kha¹ sky burial platform and chanted for deceased souls until he died.

The author uses detail to present realistic images of people, life, norms, beliefs, and architecture. In an interview, Tse ring nor bu commented that he finds new changes in the Bar skor each time he visits, which he compares to losing his memory. He also suggests there will be no old architecture for later generations. As a writer, he maintains he is responsible for preserving cultural atmospheres, lifestyles, architecture, and ordinary people for ensuing generations to realize (FT 5).

During tensions between China and the USSR, local officers organized people to dig a bomb shelter. As I read about this, I encountered images posted on WeChat about a mountain cave teahouse.² That cave was originally a bomb shelter that had become a cultural and creative experience hall.

A similar online observation complained about the disappearance of the old teahouse (FT 12). Transformations from bomb shelter to tea house support Tse ring nor bu's concern for lost historical memories, further supported by a short online article³ describing the teahouse cave and noting general ignorance of the cave's history.

The novel's themes include redemption, honesty, trustworthiness, love, and a peaceful mind. The narrator exemplifies these qualities. While a monk, he fell in love and almost became mad when the object of his affection flirted with one of his

¹ See a full introduction of Pha bong kha at <https://bit.ly/3rAunkw> 9 February 2022.

² See Tse ring 'od zer's post on 6 October 2021. For more detail on her visit, see <https://bit.ly/3qQOWJL> 20 November 2021.

³ See <https://bit.ly/3Fpgw4O> and additional pictures of the teahouse in online articles at <https://bit.ly/3nAkCRs> and <https://bit.ly/3DMOFLe> (all 20 November 2021).

friends. Moreover, he beats his wife in a rage when she refuses to express her feelings.

Before the narrator, his tutor, and the other two monks left for the monastery, a noble lady entrusted a candy tin of jewels to Zhi 'od kun dga' nyi ma. She asked him to use the jewels to obtain a metal image of Tara for her in case she lost her life in the ongoing social chaos. The tin was taken by Tibetan soldiers, as described earlier. Later tortured during the Cultural Revolution, the lady commits suicide in her house.

The narrator risked his life to redeem a metal Tara image as the noble lady had requested. He also chanted every night while his family was sleeping. Red Guards eventually discover his chanting, the Tara image he has hidden, and his *bla ma's* prayer beads, resulting in his exile. Nevertheless, he constantly sought a peaceful mind regardless of events. Zhou (2020) comments on the kindness of each character in the novel:

在小说中，这种善是在岁月无常中证得的恒星精神，去除了执念与偏见，超越了利益与情感，闪烁着佛性的光辉，沟通了文学与宗教共同的价值追求。

This sort of kindness in the novel is an eternal spirit tested in ever-changing times, eliminating obsessiveness and prejudice, transcending benefits and emotions, and shining like an aura of Buddha nature. This may connect a common value pursued by both religion and literature (Zhou 2020:71) (my translation).

and adds:

作家试图通过建构佛教文化中的善良、宽容与悲悯等精神维度，来引导人精神世界中善的神性回归，使文学的历史叙事回归到人本身，完成了对藏族古典文化中的承接与当代阐释。

By constructing the spiritual dimensions of Buddhist kindness, tolerance, and compassion, the author has attempted to guide the recurrence of divine kindness in the spiritual world of humans; consequently, literature's historical narratives have been returned to the nature of humanity. Tibetan classical literature's inheritance of the Buddhist spirit has been accomplished in contemporary

interpretations (2020:72, my translation).

The tutor and his disciple, the narrator, achieve a peaceful mind for several days when they face death, e.g., the tutor maintains a meditative state after death. While this is powerful, it is less moving than a real-life example my grandmother (1923-2010) described. In 1958, when soldiers came to my home community, older boys and men left their homes and wives and hid in the mountains to fight. She recalled:

Community women searched for their husbands and sons among the corpses scattered in the mountains. I saw an upright corpse on the lower part of a mountain slope. In the afternoon, it was still sitting there. I was frightened, but people later said that he was a religious practitioner in a meditative state. I lost my husband and only son, who was thirteen years old. If I had kept my son with me at home, he might be alive now. But at that time, older boys at home were considered to be in danger.

This account remains fresh in my memory. What impresses me today is the practitioner's serenity displayed at the moment of his death, surrounded by gunfire and explosion.

Readers will appreciate *Prayers in the Wind's* expansive presentation of daily scripture chants and traditional lyrics, providing a realistic atmosphere. The author confides that literary critics note deep sadness in his works inherited from traditional Tibetan literature.¹ Lama Jabb (2005) has also emphasized the inheritance of traditional literary elements in themes, tones, and language styles in modern Tibetan literature.

A common theme in traditional Tibetan literature is discerning the basis of suffering. Ordinary humans experience suffering until we understand its foundation. Tshe ring nor bu presents human suffering as caused by impermanence. Regardless of their station in life, his characters experience suffering and sadness. After reading *Released Sheep*, a Chinese Academy of Social

¹ See <https://bit.ly/3x5JAvC> for an interview offered by the media platform Gaoyuan Lingjuli 'Zero Distance to the Plateau' 20 November 2021.

Sciences professor said to Tse ring nor bu on the phone, "I read your story for a week. It made me cry each time I read it, stopping for a while and continuing to read. I never had this experience before" (FT 5).

Many readers will wonder why Tshe ring nor bu writes in Chinese and not in Tibetan. He has said that his expressive ability in Tibetan is not at the level of traditional Tibetan literature. Consequently, he creates his novels in Chinese because it is convenient (FT 14).

Moreover, the author mentioned that a general theme of Chinese literature advocates material value and seeking sensory stimulus, while Tibetan literature advocates sympathy and honesty. Consequently, Tibetan literature can supplement the absence of spiritual elements in Chinese literature (FT 5). However, editor Bruce Humes comments that minority culture translated into Chinese connotes a sort of falsity: "It is, of course, interesting how the ... result resembles New Age thought."¹

In terms of translation, online commentator Françoise comments positively on the English translation: "I appreciate that the translator, although not a specialist of Tibetan, has made an effort to render Tibetan names in a readable manner that is closer to Tibetan phonetics than distorted pinyin" (FT 15).

The same commentator points out minor translation issues, such as the Chinese *chang ketou* translated as 'kowitz'. Its Tibetan equivalent is *brkyangs phyag* and should be translated as 'full-length prostration'. In the Tibetan version, *sku phyag* is used several times for the Chinese *chang ketou*. *Sku pyag* generally indicates 'prostration' and may colloquially be used as an honorific, but it also describes ordinary monks and *bla ma*'s prostration in the Tibetan version. Consequently, the usage of *sku phyag* is confusing. Does it indicate the colloquial term, or is it an honorific?

Other minor issues in the Tibetan and English translated versions include a rough description of chewing bubblegum at Gser thang Manor. The English translation missed some information on

¹ Visit <https://bit.ly/3DEQdqE> 20 November 2021.

pages 52 and 143 of the Tibetan version. Both translations omit a lyric presented on page 112 of the Chinese version. On the same page of the English version mentioned above, the English translator inserts a lyric absent in both the Tibetan and Chinese versions.

The Tibetan and English versions both read fluently. The English version offers explanations for outsiders to the Tibetan cultural world in the first three pages, making it more accessible as they read the novel. If Wylie had been offered for the transliterated terms, it would have helped readers understand the original Tibetan, e.g., Françoise asserts, "Zhyiö looks so unfamiliar I cannot figure out what the Tibetan original might be" (FT 14).

The Tibetan version is vivid and authentic with its colloquial expressions, daily scripture chants, and traditional lyrics. It is impossible to fathom the scriptures and dharma lyrics without the Tibetan version in comprehensively understanding this novel, and it also explains its popularity among Tibetan readers.

After five years of preparation and writing, the author states:

为了完成这部长篇小说，光收集、查阅资料，走访、调研，我花了三年的时间，通过创作《祭语风中》，我深切地感受到一个作家平时储备知识的重要性，创作中不能存有侥幸心理，一定要踏踏实实。

I spent three years collecting and reading materials, interviewing people, and investigating to complete this novel. In creating *Prayers in the Wind*, I profoundly sensed the importance of knowledge a writer should possess and maintain integrity and diligence in the process of writing (Hu and Ciren Luobu 2016:119, my translation).

Prayers in the Wind's panoramic presentation of Tibetan culture, history, and people, provides insights into Tibetan religious and secular life in the pre-1949 period and social transitions in the 1950s-1970s. From a monk's perspective, individual suffering and hope from social-political changes offer objective descriptions that add to the novel's significance. In presenting this version of recent social history in three languages, readers can better appreciate what Tibetan writers envisioned and presented before the 2020s.

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TIBETAN TERMS

'brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྐྱིད།

jigs med dbang grags འཇིགས་མེད་དབང་གྲགས།

bla ma བླ་མ།

brkyangs phyag བརྒྱུད་སྤྱུག་པ།

chab mdo ཆབ་མདོ།

Lama Jabb, bla ma skyabs བླ་མ་སྐུ་བས།

lha sa ལྷ་ས།

lho brag nor bzang ལྷོ་བྲག་ནོར་བཟང་།

mi la ras pa མེ་ལ་རས་པ།

nor dpal zur རྣོར་དཔལ་ཕུར།

pad+ma rig 'dzin པད་མ་རིག་འཛིན།

pho ba ཕོ་བ།

pyag ཕྱག་པ།

Qomolangma; jo mo glang ma རྩོམ་གླང་མ།

rdo rje rgya mtshan རྩོམ་རྩེ་རྒྱ་མཚན།

Sertang, gser thang གསེར་ཐང་།

sne mo སྒེ་མོ།

Tsering Norbu, tshe ring nor མཚོ་རིང་ནོར་བུ།

tshwa tshwa མོ་མོ།

yi dam ཡི་དམ།

zhi 'od kun dga' nyi ma ཞི་འོད་ཀུན་

དགའ་ཉི་མ།

CHINESE TERMS

2009 Nian Zhongguo

Duanpian Xiaoshuoji

2009 年中国短篇小说集

21 Shiji Zhongguo Dangdai

Wenxue 21

世纪中国当代文学

Changdu 昌都

Ciren Luobu 次仁罗布

chang ketou 长磕头

Fangcao 芳草

Li Jiajun 李佳军

Lu Xun 鲁迅

Mao 毛

Nimu 尼木

Wanmerenzeng 完么仁增

Wusizang 乌斯藏

Xiaoshuo xuankan 小说选刊

Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报

REVIEW: *FLOWERS OF LHASA* BY TSHE RING G.YANG SKYID

Reviewed by Pad+ma rig 'dzin བཱ་ཤ་རིག་འཛིན། (Wanmerenzeng 完 么仁增)*



Tshe ring g.yang skyid ཚེ་རིང་གཡང་སྒྱིད། 2015. *Me tog dang rmi lam* མེ་ཏོག་དང་རི་ལམ། [*Flowers of Lha sa*]. Lha sa ལྷ་ས།: Bod ljong mi dmang dpe bskrun khang བོད་ཚུངས་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང། [Tibet People's Publishing House]. 304pp. ISBN:978-7223-04958-0 (Paperback 28 RMB).



Tsering Yangkyi [Tshe ring g.yang skyid ཚེ་རིང་གཡང་སྒྱིད།]. 2022. *Flowers of Lhasa* [*Me tog dang rmi lam* མེ་ཏོག་དང་རི་ལམ།] (Christopher Peacock, translator). London: Balestier Press. 206pp. ISBN-13: 978-1913891220 (Paperback 16.99USD) Amazon link: <https://amzn.to/3yvnyLYj>

TSHE RING G.YANG SKYID

The inside cover of the Tibetan language version informs that Tshe ring g.yang skyid was born in a common worker's family by the Yar lung River in 1963. After graduating from Tibet University, she worked as a teacher and continued writing creatively, with fiction as a major focus. In 2007, her collected stories, *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*¹ *White Clouds on the Mountain Peaks* won the Dijiujie Shaoshu Minzu Yuyan Wenxue Chuangzuo Junmajiang 'Ninth National Minority Literature Horse Award'. Her collected essays *Mi tshe'i 'grul bzhud* 'Journey of Life' was published in 2014. Subsequently, she concentrated on her first novel, *Me tog dang rmi lam* 'Flowers of Lhasa', released in 2016 and attracted many readers from the three Tibetan regions in China and positive comments on social media, in newspapers, and magazines. Her

* Pad+ma rig 'dzin (Wanmerenzeng). 2023. Review: *Flowers of Lhasa* by Tshe ring g.yang skhid. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:457-468.

¹ Virtanen offers short summaries for each story in *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar* 'White Clouds on the Mountain Peaks' (2013:128-129).

stories *So nam shor ba'i ljang bu* 'The Abandoned Sprout' won the Third *Sbrang char* Literature Award, and *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar* 'White Clouds on the Mountain' won the Second Gangs Rgyan Cup (Mkha' bzang mo 2019:18).

FLOWERS OF LHASA - CHARACTERS

In the list below, I give the characters' names as they appear in the English version, followed by the Wylie version (which I use in this review), and English and Wylie names for the "four flowers."

The "Four Flowers"

- Drölkar, Sgrol dkar, Dahlia, Pad kha'i me tog
- Dzomky, 'Dzoms skyid, Magnolia, Aug chos me tog
- Xiao Li, Cassia, Ltogs lha me tog
- Yangdzom, G.yang 'dzoms, Azalea, Ba lu me tog

Other Characters

- Butri, Bu khrid, manages a small restaurant
- Drolma, A cag sgrol ma, the wife of Snyan grags
- Karma Dorjie, Skar ma rdo rje, the businessman who rapes Sgol dkar
- Lhadze, Lha mdzes, the daughter of Snyan grags
- Nyendrak, Snyan grags, a county official

The author omnisciently describes four young women's challenges, hopes, and dreams. Three are from Tibetan rural areas, and one is from a Chinese agricultural area of Sichuan Province. All four have the same destiny in Lha sa City. Initially taking service jobs, they eventually work as highly paid, disreputable employees of an establishment known as the Rose. Afterward, the four do not find an urban identity or return to rural life - a double identity crisis (Zengbaodangzhou 2018:185).

The first chapter opens with Bu khrid, a small Tibetan restaurant owner, and the first seasonal snowfall in Lha sa City. Bu khrid's frustration from limited business is intensified by a bunch of noisy kids. Venting her depression, she throws a lump of coal at

the kids who disappear into the horizon, leaving long dirty spots on a white snow-filled expanse. These unpleasant black stains foreshadow the eventual lives of the girls at the Rose, who give themselves names of flowers, concealing their real names while working in the city and avoiding verbal interaction with people in the common yard where their rented room is located. Their neighbors secretly refer to them as 'Owls' because they work at night.

Bu khrid is from the same village as Sgrol dkar and experienced the same fate and difficulties as what awaits the girls in Lha sa City. Bu khrid makes an appointment with a wealthy man and Sgrol dkar at her restaurant on the day of the first snowfall. Unfamiliar with drinking and flirting as social practice, Sgrol dkar agrees to meet the man, Rdo rje, who, with his friend, forces Sgrol dkar to drink beer, and later in the night, Rdo rje rapes her, which the story suggests, destroys her normal life and future dreams. Before this unfortunate event, we are unaware of Sgrol dkar's job, though her cracked hands and hunger in the afternoon when she reaches the restaurant hint that her life is not easy. The author deftly employs flashbacks, maneuvering between events in the narrative, challenging her readers to read carefully to grasp the storyline (Rna me 2021:130).

Sgrol dkar reappears in later chapters in a scene when she meets an acquaintance, G.yang 'dzoms, who was orphaned in early childhood. When she is a teenager, Snyan grags, a county official, visits her village and brings her to his home to work as a maid. Her diligence and hard work make her an excellent cook and housekeeper. However, the constant conflict between Snyan grags' wife and their teenage daughter makes life at the official's opulent house unpleasant. In time, the official's wife falsely accuses G.yang 'dzoms of stealing. In desperation, she leaves the house and wanders the city streets.

Recalling that she has Sgrol dkar's phone number, G.yang 'dzoms dials it, and Sgrol dkar soon arrives and takes her to a rented room she shares with two other "flowers." Sgrol dkar tells G.yang 'dzoms to stay with her where they both can live on her earnings. She does not tell her about her work at the Rose. Feeling lonely and useless, G.yang 'dzoms goes to work as a restaurant dishwasher.

Sgrol dkar visits and observes her washing dishes under cold running water without gloves. Constant washing dishes, pans, and towels lead to her hands cracking and bleeding. Sgrol dkar sympathetically takes her back to their room. That night, she calls a Chinese businessman for supper at a high-end restaurant.

Later, Sgrol dkar asks the Chinese man to buy clothes for G.yang 'dzoms and insists she accept them despite her discomfort in taking a stranger's gift. She becomes noticeably more attractive after putting on the clothes.

To relieve her boredom and loneliness, G.yang 'dzoms accompanies Sgrol dkar to the Rose and is left alone on a sofa when Sgrol dkar leaves to serve her customers till dawn. Subsequently, G.yang 'dzoms joins the servers, learns how to dance, and offers stage performances for the customers attracted by her slim body and dance skills.

One night a male customer invites her to accompany him to drink beer and insists G.yang 'dzoms drink. When she is intoxicated, he rapes her. The next morning Sgrol dkar finds G.yang 'dzoms naked in bed, desperately weeping. The author provides a detailed description of a white sheet dotted with blood and red lanterns hanging from the ceiling, an image reminding the reader of the dirty spots on white snow in the first chapter.

As noted by Orthofer,¹ the other two girls have similar difficult lives after poverty ends their schooling or a family member forces them to earn money for the family. In contrast, 'Dzoms skyid has a pleasant family life with her parents until her boyfriend discards her after learning she is pregnant during their senior high school years. Drugs to induce an abortion send her to the hospital. After regaining consciousness, her mother, sitting by her bed, spits in her face and scolds her for disgracing the family. This leads to 'Dzoms skyid leaving her home and eventually working at the Rose.

The last "flower," Xiao Li, is a Chinese girl from rural Sichuan Province. After her stepmother gives birth to a son, she takes Xiao Li out of middle school and compels her to earn money to support the family and help provide a good education for her only

¹ <https://bit.ly/3Kd3evW> 19 August 2022.

son, who she hopes will become a government official. Her father goes to work in Shanghai, hoping to ease his daughter's hard life. Predictably, the evil stepmother's mistreatment intensifies once the father is absent. Xiao Li leaves home for Lha sa City, where she works in a barber shop and becomes acquainted with girls who work at the Rose, where she eventually finds employment.

Xiao Li is depicted as selfish, stingy, and self-centered, saving money, and taking advantage of her roommates by wearing their new fancy clothes. When Sgrol dkar becomes very ill, Xiao Li is afraid of contracting her illness and doesn't wear the fine clothes Sgrol dkar gives her, reflecting a general historical Tibetan view of the Han.

Once Sgrol dkar was ill, Xiao Li grudgingly offers some of her precious money to help her:

Before leaving the hospital, Cassia took 500 yuan from her purse and gave it to Dahlia. This decision had required a steely determination on her part, but even still she was loath to part with the money, and she caressed the bills for a good while before handing them over (English version:175).

Despite differences and tensions, the girls' similar life backgrounds and fates unite them under a single shared roof where they support each other.

Sgrol dkar becomes ill and is hospitalized. As her illness steadily worsens, the girls pool their cash, gold necklaces, and rings to pay for Sgrol dkar's medical expenses. Xiao Li and 'Dzoms skyid realize that their work at the Rose threatens their life, so they decide to leave for home while G.yang 'dzoms stays to care for Sgrol dkar. After Sgrol dkar dies, G.yang 'dzoms finds herself behind a nun prostrating around the Bar skor. Spellbound by the pristine purity shining from the nun's eyes, the author hints that G.yang 'dzoms may become a nun, but this is open-ended.

...

"The voice of the narrative is full of sympathy," writes Sgo me snying byams thse ring (2021:146), a comment resonating with what is often heard from Tibetans, particularly the emphasis on compassion and tolerance, especially stressed by elders and

religious figures. I hasten to add that real life has many contractions rendering Tibetan lives as complex as those of other human groups.

G.yang 'dzoms resents A cag sgrol ma who maligns and expels her from the house where she works as a servant. She is also extremely angry with Bu khrid for taking advantage of Sgrol dkar's beauty to maneuver her into an intoxicated vulnerable situation to satisfy the sexual desire of a man whose support she wants for her small failing restaurant. Sgrol dkar's rape is depicted as ruining her life.

When G.yang 'dzoms later encounters aged Bu khrid near a monastery, sweeping steep stone steps, she almost explodes from pent-up anger. However, the tenderness of Bu khrid's chanting calms G.yang 'dzoms, engendering sympathy to the point that she gives fifty RMB to old Bu khrid, who is now a nun. Her boundless tolerance allows her to forgive poor aged A cag sgrol ma, caged in endless sorrow and regret. Similarly, 'Dzoms skyid was not tolerated by her mother because of her high school pregnancy, but after a period of separation, she says, "As long as your heart is clean that's all that matters" (English version:199). Resentment, tolerance, and understanding between the characters solve conflict.

The novel ends with a certain peacefulness. On the night Sgrol dkar passes away, she falls asleep more calmly than the nights before. 'Dzoms skyid's family is again harmonious, and G.yang 'dzoms experiences a deep sense of tranquility when encountering the prostrating nun on the circumambulation circuit. However, after Sgrol dkar's death, G.yang 'dzoms escorts 'Dzoms skyid to the bus station and goes to a nearby teahouse where the slowness and leisurely atmosphere disturb her, as do the clothing, make-up, and the behavior of waitresses (newcomers to the city from remote areas) in the next door restaurant as they try to attract male passersby on the street into the restaurant. This repulsion, however, does nothing to alter Sgrol dkar and her friends' unpleasant fates as life in the city continues.

What explains such tragedy? The attraction of unrealistic romantic ideas about the big glittering city where money can be made more easily than farming? Competition between rural families where the city and incomes that can be earned offer victory?

For example, Sgrol dkar earned enough to build a new house in her village so her family would not be denigrated, and she also supports her brother through his university education but at the cost of her life.

Virtanen (2013) stresses that Tshe ring g.yang skyid focuses on female development - the growth of female protagonists. Sgo me snying byams tshe ring (2021:141) comments that the urban space the author chose is crucial to creating *Flowers of Lhasa*, where the four key female characters are in the process of development when discontinuing their formal education after middle school. Lacking the maturity to make wise life decisions, their mistakes are accentuated by the girls' admiration of a female doctor who encourages the girls to make correct life choices. While Sgrol dkar is hospitalized, she confides that if she recovers from her illness, she will return home and be an honest farmer even though, as G.yang' dzoms recognizes, the prevailing social view is, "...once a woman is labelled a prostitute, she will forever be a prostitute" (English version:204).

G.yang 'dzoms recalls her friend's regret before she died, "I have nothing left but resentment and regret my past. This illness is the only thing that life has left me with" (English version:204). Likewise, regardless of why the girls became sex workers, they all admitted they made the wrong journey and longed for a normal honest life in their homeland. Is this for an educational purpose? Mkha' 'gro bzang mo claims:

Tshe ring g.yang skyid advocates using realistic literature and creativity in uniting literature and social reality to educate and persuade readers of the value of beauty, truth, and kindness to society (Mkha' bzang mo 2019:21).

Tshe ring g.yang skyid highlights men's disgusting, offensive behavior in this novel. For example, Xiao Li is treated sadistically by a Chinese customer who almost bites off one of her nipples and shoves a beer bottle into her vagina. Sgrol dkar and G.yang' dzoms are raped by men, emphasizing the girls' helplessness, weakness, and subsequent hopelessness. Once the

girls lose hope for a respectable life, they make wrong choices emphasizing how the loss of virginity negatively affects the girls' psyches.¹

The Rose's boss convinces the girls to sign contracts with their fingerprints and then asks them to pay 2,000 RMB as a deposit. Lacking the funds, they must agree to work at the Rose to pay off the deposit. G.yang' dzoms was also expelled from her maid position in the official's mansion without pay. 'Dzoms skyid' describes men with a Tibetan proverb: "...she thought they were all the same, heartless, fickler than a horse is fast or a sheep's tail is short" (English version: 171).

Tshe ring g.yang skyid does allow for moments of agency. 'Dzoms skyid slaps a Chinese man after learning he secretly tested her blood in a hospital for STI (Sexually Transmitted Infections), and Sgrol dkar tries to punish those who discriminate against and unfairly treat G.yang' dzoms. For example, she criticizes a restaurant manager for forcing G.yang' dzoms to use her bare hands to wash dishes with cold water and suggests G.yang' dzoms collect wages she is due from A cag sgrol ma.

Regarding language use, Mkha' 'gro bzang mo (2019:52) lists some fifty Lha sa dialectical items from *Flowers of Lhasa* to stress how the author's life background influences her novel. However, most such lexical formulations can be found in dictionaries and not the colloquial speech of a certain location of the enormous Tibet Autonomous Region, i.e., readers from A mdo areas (like me) can easily understand the novel's language. The items include the English word "glass" written phonetically in Tibetan, which I also encountered in *Prayers in the Wind* (Tshe ring nor bu) and *The Secret Tale of Tesur House* (Brag gdong bkraṣ gling dbang rdoṅ). This is testimony to the influence of English on earlier Tibetan society. I also found the use of human names for beer of interest, e.g., Lha sa beer, "Lha sgron," and Budweiser, "Pal sgron."

¹ The significance of virginity to Tibetans is controversial. Lobsang Yongdan, for example, criticizes the idea of the importance of virginity presented in Tibetan literature, claiming that emphasis on maintaining virginity until marriage is a Chinese (not Tibetan) cultural trait (<https://bit.ly/3L6bjTu> 12 September 2022).

Mkha' 'gro bzang mo (2019:53) and Bstan 'dzin chos nyid (2018:62) praise the skillful use of Tibetan proverbs that Christopher Peacock has deftly translated, along with folksong lyrics and the text in general. For example, well-known Tibetan song lyrics go:

We're fated to be a pair of swans; if all we've got to eat is reeds, at least we can eat them together.

and

When the willow on that mountain bends, the poplar on this mountain bends; when they bend, they bend together, when they don't, it's each to their own (English version:65 and 54, respectively).

Tibetan-English readers might more easily recognize characters' names and places in the English version if Wylie transliterations were provided, at least in an appendix.

The author's tone and narrative style render the intricate details of the supporting stories into coherent narratives. For example, Sgo me snying byams tshe ring (2021) comments, "Readers seem to listen to the narrative face to face" (146). Bstan 'dzin chos nyid has a somewhat different reading, commenting on what she deems an oversimplified approach in focusing on tragic life stories rather than the value of love and other positive aspects of society (2018:76-77).

I recommend the English version to non-Tibetan culture readers because it represents a slice of contemporary Tibetan life on the edge of modernization, featuring conflicts related to education, generation gaps, and differences between rural and urban residents. For example, the author describes the discomfort of Sgrol dkar's parents in the city when Sgrol dkar's mother refuses to eat in a city restaurant, insisting that the restaurant's unclean food will defile her and hurt her teeth. Readers seeking a better understanding of Tibetan culture and contemporary life, particularly fragile female "lives marred by lack of opportunities,

poverty, and resignation,"¹ will benefit from this realistic novel.

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TIBETAN TERMS

aug chos me tog རྒྱལ་ཆོས་མེ་རྟོག

ba lu me tog བ་ལུ་མེ་རྟོག

brag gdong bkras gling dbang

rdor བྲག་གཞིང་བཀྲས་གླིང་དབང་རྟོག

Butri, bu khrid ཐུ་བྲི་བུ་ཁྱིད་

Drölkar, sgrol dkar རྩོལ་དཀར་

Drolma, a cag sgrol ma

ཨ་ཅག་རྩོལ་མ།

Dzomky, 'dzoms skyid

འཛོམས་སྒྱུད་

gangs rgyan གང་རྒྱུན་

Karma Dorjie, karma rdo rje

ཀར་རྟོ་རྗེ།

lha sgron ལྷ་སྒྲོན་

Lhadze, lha mdzes ལྷ་མཛེས་

Lhasa, Lha sa ལྷ་ས།

ltogs lha me tog ལྷགས་ལྷ་མེ་རྟོག

mi tshe'i 'grul bzhud

མི་ཆེད་འབྲུལ་བཞུད་

mkha' 'gro bzang mo

མཁའ་འགྲོ་བཟང་མོ།

Nyandrak, snyan grags

སྒྲན་བྲགས།

pad kha'i me tog པད་ཁའི་མེ་རྟོག

pal sgron པལ་སྒྲོན་

rna me རྣ་མེ།

rnam thar རྣམ་ཐར།

sbrang char སྤང་ཆར།

sgo me snying byams tshe

ring སྒོ་མེ་སྤྱིང་བྱམས་ཆེ་ཅིང་།

so nam shor ba'i ljang bu

སོ་ནམ་ཤོར་བའི་ལྷང་བུ།

srang སྤང་།

Tsering Yangkyi, tshe ring

gyang skyid ཆེ་ཅིང་གཡང་སྒྱུད་

tshe ring nor bu ཆེ་ཅིང་ནོར་བུ།

Yangdzom, g.yang 'dzoms

གཡང་འཛོམས།

zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Dijiujie Shaoshu Minzu Yuyan Wenxue Chuangzuo Junmajiang

第九届少数民族语言文学创作骏马奖

Sichuan 四川

Xiao Li 小李

Xining 西宁

REVIEW: *HOPES, GATHERINGS, AND NEW BEGINNINGS: AN A MDO TIBETAN NEW YEAR IN 2018* BY KLU THAR RGYAL ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

Reviewed by Sami Honkasalo (University of Helsinki)*



Klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།. 2021. *Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings: An A Mdo Tibetan New Year in 2018* (3rd edition), bit.ly/3XHtcyj 7 July 2023

At one level, Klu thar rgyal's *Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings* is a meticulous description of celebrating Lo sar (Tibetan New Year) in the Tsha nag community of Qinghai on a single occasion in 2018. At another level, the ethnography is also an autobiographic narrative of the author's observation of change and continuity in the Amdo Tibetan culture of his region and reminiscences about his family and community. Klu thar rgyal is not an independent observer arriving to report from the outside but an active participant in most of the described events connecting his own direct personal experiences and memories with the recollections of earlier generations he has come to know during his life. Consequently, while the book's core narrative focuses on the present era and its practices, Klu thar rgyal offers the reader a glimpse of the historical aspects of what he observes, creating a web of narration intertwining the present and past. Lo sar appears not as a static celebration but a constantly evolving cultural practice reshaped by societal changes.

The book begins by describing the historical background of the Tsha nag community and its habitants based on oral family and community history. Klu thar rgyal narrates how the region became incorporated into the People's Republic of China and how life subsequently evolved, resulting in major changes quickly. Day-by-day narration follows as Lo sar celebrations progress.

* Sami Honkasalo. 2023. Review: *Hopes, Gatherings, and New beginnings: An A mdo Tibetan New Year in 2018* by Klu thar rgyal. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:469-471.

Conflict between tradition and modernity is a central theme in this narration. Focusing on how peoples of the Tibetosphere negotiate their place at the crossroads of the two has been the subject of research such as Norberg-Hodge's (1991) well-known work on Ladakh, and Burnett's (2014) research among the Gyalrongwa, to name two from the distant poles of the Tibetan cultural sphere. The Tsha nag community Lo sar has been permanently transformed by socioeconomic change. As Klu thar rgyal spells it out in his conclusion:

Electricity, TV, telephones, and cars were not part of my early childhood. Most locals walked while making Lo sar visits. Some elders rode horses. You could hear folk songs during Lo sar visits, and elders gave good wishes when you visited. Such songs and good wishes are now silent (210).

Two aspects of the book make it even more useful. First, the story is supplemented by photos that enrich the narration. This visual dimension further highlights the central theme of continuity and change. For instance, Figure 64 (146) portrays a local woman holding a *kha btags* 'ritual scarf', singing a traditional love song during a wedding while recorded by smartphones held by onlookers. Most photographs capture spontaneous events rather than being carefully planned with inevitable unnaturalness and artificiality, increasing their documentation value. Second, the book uses Wylie transliteration for Tibetan instead of an ad-hoc spelling of the copiously used Tibetan terms. While the book's abundance of Tibetan terms requires more effort from readers with limited or no familiarity with Tibetan culture and language, this encourages readers to search for more information concerning particular topics of interest.

Tibetan culture is often exoticized in the West and China, where it may serve as the "exotic other" for the Western and Han Chinese gaze. Jinba Tenzin (2014:56) illustrates this in the case of Suopo Tibetans in Danba, Sichuan, with Danba branded a "Valley of Beauties" and the Suopo area therein identified as one of the possible locations of an alleged "Eastern Queendom." Danba has thus emerged in recent decades as a tourist spot drawing

predominantly domestic visitors eager to experience the imaginary land of beautiful Tibetan ladies of high status and desire to engage in free love. Focusing on everyday tasks, Klu thar rgyal's account is a welcome antidote to the exoticization of Tibetan culture and its practices.

A vast body of research and literature connected to Tibetan cultures exists in English and other Western languages. However, cultural outsiders are still largely responsible for deciding how Tibet is discussed. The case of Tibet is not unique, given similar dynamics in many other non-Western cultures. Fortunately, however, recent years have seen more internationally oriented academic work in the Tibetosphere conducted by cultural insiders. Against this backdrop, Klu thar rgyal's work is particularly noteworthy since he speaks with an insider's voice and shows that Tibetans need not be merely subjects in work conducted by outsiders. They can also be authors with agency, telling their stories with their voices. In this respect, Klu thar rgyal's *Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings* serves as a model for young Tibetans who wish to document the ongoing rapid transitions reshaping their cultural traditions in the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity and share their findings with global audiences.

In conclusion, Klu thar rgyal's *Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings* is a welcome contribution to documenting the plurality of Lo sar practices in the Tibetosphere. May it inspire similar documentation by Tibetans of their transitioning cultural practices as Tibetans search for their place and shape in the modern world.

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REVIEW: *GOOD BOYS NEVER CRY*

BY GU RU 'PHRIN LAS གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།*

Reviewed by Gengqiugelai (更求格来, Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལགས།) University of Zurich



Gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས། (Gerichengli 格日成立). 2022. *Good Boys Never Cry*. KDP: <https://bit.ly/3jeA71X>. ASIN BoBL99M12L, ISBN-13 979-8361620401. Paperback 201 pp. USD9.66.

T Tibetans from a pastoral background in China have been writing literature in English for a relatively short time and, with some notable exceptions, there isn't much of it.¹ This alone makes *Good Boys Never Cry* by Gu ru 'phrin las important, but there are other reasons, too, which I address.

Gu ru's stories (and one script) in this collection may be placed in three categories: the pre-modern, a time of transition, and young Tibetans in contemporary urban settings. Stories in the first category include "A Pregnant Boy," "Seven Years," "Fickle Love," and "Girl With A Tail." These stories concern Tibetan life in tents, natural disasters, and their consequences as they deal with theft, masculinity, and religious belief.

A time of transition features twelve stories: "The Boy," "A New Family," "A Good Boy," "A Herdswoman," "Her," "No Escape," "Couples," "Is Age Just A Number?," "Golden Town Restaurant," "Big Mouth Kids," "An Abandoned House," and "The Patron." They focus on gender inequality, imperfect marriages, family honor, and arranged marriages.

Finally, five texts concern young Tibetans living in cities: "Saturday," "Love at Dream Lake," "A Bad, Unkind Man?" "An

* Gengqiugelai (Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs). 2023. Review: *Good Boys Never Cry* by Gu ru 'phrin las. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:472-476.

² Notable exceptions include Rin chen rdo rje (2011), Sonam Doomtso (2011), Karma Dondrub (2013), Chos bstan rgyal (2014), Pema Kyi (2015), Sangs rgyas bkra shis et al. (2015), Tsering Bum (2016), Klu thar rgyal et al. (2020), Klu thar rgyal et al. (2020), and Klu thar rgyal (2021).

Unclean Bloodline?" and "The Painting" (a script).

I will now comment on one story from each of these categories. In "A Pregnant Boy," a father leaves for Lha sa with tribal companions to trade. Floodwater sweeps the family's livestock into the Yellow River in his absence. Time passes, and starvation looms. The mother and her son's usual diet is meat, dairy products, and a limited supply of barley flour. Having lost all their livestock and thus their main food supply, the desperate mother leaves with her son to find her brother living in another tribe. She injures her leg on the way and cannot walk for some days. Their only food, a meager supply of barley flour, is nearly exhausted when she recovers enough to walk. The boy's belly is swollen from severe malnutrition (explaining the story's title). Eventually, they find refuge in a Tibetan camp. The return of the boy's father happily concludes this story.

"Big Mouth Kids" deals with spousal abuse. Sayyangtso¹ observes her drunken neighbor, Kneejep, grab his wife's hair and beat her while she is on the ground. Later, Sayyangtso comes home for lunch from herding her family's yaks on a mountain and finds her mother sobbing with a severely swollen cheek. Her mother later tells her, "Don't tell others your father beat me" (124) because it would damage the family's reputation, highlighting the pressure on Tibetan wives to remain silent about the physical abuse they suffer from their husbands.

"Saturday," in the third category, focuses on university student life in urban settings, including vivid descriptions of gym activity, graphic city street dramas, and how random encounters on a bus radically alter initial impressions of people.

This compilation of real and imagined, at times nostalgic, memories is rooted in a nomadic tribe experiencing rapid social transition from mobile pastoralism to a partially sedentary way of life as black yak-hair tents are replaced by permanent housing and manufactured tents. A new mundane emerges with motorcycles and

¹ The author employs phoneticized versions of his Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan dialect for Tibetan names and terms. These terms and their Wylie and Tibetan script equivalents are presented at the end of the book.

automobiles replacing walking, horseback and yakback riding, and smartphones and television irrevocably impacting social connections, further defining a newfangled normal. The details of the circumstances of these collective memories and experiences are fresh enough to be vividly and realistically described, especially by the writer Gu ru 'phrin las, who has a lived Tibetan pastoralist background. His important *Remembering Tomorrow* and its collective memories of Tibetans in herding groups raised in black yak-hair tents testify to his background and qualifications in authentically portraying Tibetan pastoral life.

When public social security was absent, sworn brothers, rifles, and horseback riders were de-facto admirable problem-solving solutions in this pre-modern society where life was precarious. The father and brother in "Seven Years" demonstrate their masculinity with violence. "Good boys never cry" is more than a phrase to hush boys' tears in its poignant capturing of one of the many painful steps from boyhood to manhood. In sharp contrast, this traditional society offers girls and women a social norm without independent qualities. For example, "A good girl listens to her parents, like Lhamo, who earned the greatest woman award in our community," (64) illustrates how parents' wishes can act as obstacles, even deterrents, to a woman wishing to pursue her dreams and happiness ("A New Family").

Other social norms are also revealed. For example, a family with no man is discriminated against as the family seeks to find marriage partners for the daughters and establish relations with others. Another time, a masculine hairdo and a girl's manly comportment substitute for the absence of a man in a family ("An Unclean Bloodline?"). In "The Patron," despite withstanding a sequence of unfortunate fates, including her parents' divorce when she was a very young child, her husband's death, no children, and malicious local gossip, an independent restaurant owner continues to endure long, cold, lonely nights.

These powerful stories have important insights and implications. For example, the stories' cultural and linguistic integration of young Tibetans in Chinese cities and amalgamation into mainstream society ("The Painting") deliberately avoid

expressing Tibetan and Han identities, giving a sense of diminishing ethnic individuality among Tibetan university students. An example is Tenzin Jinba's provocative questions among the prefatory blurbs:

If nomadic life, often embodying idealized Tibetan mobility, freedom, spirituality, happiness, and masculinity, withdraws from the historical stage, what will the "Tibetan spirit" be? What will make Tibetans Tibetan?

I highly recommend this collection and its valuable ethnographic observations to readers wishing to learn more about contemporary challenges confronting pastoralists and Tibetan life from the early twenty-first century to today.

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TIBETAN TERMS

Guhretrinlee, gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།
 Kneejep, gnas skyabs གནས་སྤྱབས།
 Konchok Gelek, dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།
 Lha sa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།
 Lhamo, lha mo ལྷ་མོ།
 Mgo log, mgo log མགོ་ལོག།
 Sayyangtso, tshe g.yang mtsho ཚེ་གཡང་མཚོ།
 Tenzin Jinba, bstan 'dzin sbyin pa འབྲུན་འཛིན་སྤྱིན་པ།

CHINESE TERMS

Gengqiugelai 更求格来
 Gerichengli 格日成立
 Guoluo 果洛

REVIEW: ZAI XUEBAOXIAGU ZHONG DENGDAI
'LAPANTHÈRE DES NEIGES' BY SYLVAIN TESSON

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Sylvain Tesson (Lin Youxuan 林佑轩, translator).
2021. *Zai Xuebaoxiagu zhong Dengdai* 在雪豹峡谷中等待 [*La panthère des neiges; Waiting in Snow Leopard Canyon*]. Xin bei shi 新北市 [New Taipei City]: Mu ma wen hua shi ye gu fen you xian gong si 木马文化事业股份有限公司 [Ecus Cultural Enterprise LTD.] 256pp. ISBN 978-986-359-860-2. (paperback 360 NTD).

Sylvain Tesson (b. 1972) is a contemporary French writer, adventurer, and nature explorer who attributes his philosophical reflections on life to his travels. These sojourns include motorcycling across the European continent, living alone in Siberia for a half-year, and joining a photographic team in Tibetan areas in China. His books have won various awards, including the Prix Goncourt de la nouvelle¹ in 2009 and the Prix Renaudot,² in 2019. In 1996, his first travelogue, *On a roulé sur la terre 'We Rolled on the Ground'*, based on his bicycle tour, was followed by a series of travelogues including *La Marche dans le ciel: 5000 km à pied à travers l'Himalaya* 'Walking in the Sky: 5000 km Walk Through the Himalayas' (1998), *La Chevauchée des steppes 'The Ride of the*

* Wu Jing and Zhao Junshuai. 2023. Review: *Zai Xue Bao Xia Gu Zhong Deng Dai 'La panthère des neiges'* by Sylvain Tesson. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:477-487.

¹ The Prix Goncourt de la nouvelle is a literary prize awarded annually since 1974 in conjunction with the Prix Goncourt by the Académie Goncourt. Formerly awarded as Goncourt scholarships, this prize has been awarded in partnership with the City of Strasbourg on the occasion of the "Ideal Libraries" since 2001.

² The Prix Théophraste Renaudot, more commonly known as the Prix Renaudot, is a literary prize created in 1926 by ten journalists and literary critics based on the deliberations of the Prix Goncourt jury.

Steppes (2001), (*Carnets de Steppes: à cheval à travers l'Asie centrale*) 'Notebooks of the Steppes: Horseback Riding through Central Asia' (2002), and *Sous l'étoile de la liberté. Six mille kilomètres à travers l'Eurasie sauvage* 'Under the Star of Liberty. Six Thousand Kilometers Across the Eurasian Wild' (2004).

In 2010, Tesson lived a reclusive life for six months in a rustic cabin on the shores of Lake Baikal. His Thoreau-style experiences of solidarity revelation are recounted in *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* 'Consolations of the Forest: Alone in a Cabin on the Siberian Taiga', which earned the Dolman Best Travel Book Award in 2014.¹ Released in 2011 and co-directed by Florence Tran, the documentary, *Alone, 180 Days on Lake Baikal*² reveals the beauty of an untamed environment.

Two of Tesson's books have been translated into Chinese, and numerous related papers have appeared in Chinese academia. In 2015, a year after its publication, the Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House issued Zhou Peiqiong's translation of *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* as 'Zai Xiboliyasenlin zhong' ('In the Forests of Siberia'). Three years later (2016), Tencent Video³ introduced the film *Zai Xiboliyasenlin zhong*, based on the book. Liang Ruoyu prepared a traditional Chinese character version of the book *Beijia'erhu yinju zhaji*, published in 2020 by Ecus Cultural Enterprise LTD.

¹ The Dolman Best Travel Book Award (2006-2014) is now The Stanford Dolman Travel Book of the Year. Named after Edward Stanford, the award is sponsored by Stanfords, a travel books and map store established in London in 1853. The Stanford Dolman Travel Book of the Year is one of two principal annual travel book awards in Britain, and the only one open to all writers. The other award is made annually by the British Guild of Travel Writers and is limited to authors who are members of the Guild (<https://bit.ly/3IeaCVz>, 18 January 2022) (my translation).

² See the full documentary at <https://bit.ly/3o4rvdC> 29 January 2022.

³ Tencent Video, launched in April 2011, is an online video platform with popular content and professional media operation capabilities in China. A comprehensive video content platform, it aggregates popular movies and TV shows, variety, entertainment, sports events, news and information programs, provides users with video entertainment through PCs, mobiles, and living room products (<https://bit.ly/3GFroNo> 18 January 2022, my translation).

La Panthère des neiges (2019) was initially published by Gillmard Publishing House and sold over 400,000 copies (French edition). Frank Wynne translated it into English as *The Art of Patience: Seeking the Snow Leopard in Tibet* (2021), which Penguin published.¹ The traditional Chinese translation version *Zai Xuebaoxiabu zhong dengdai* was released by Ecus Cultural Enterprise LTD. in the same year. Lin Youxuan (b. 1987), the translator, is a contemporary novelist and writer who has received the First Prize of Taipei Literature Award for Fiction and the Jury Prize of Liang Shiqiu Literature Award for Prose and was renowned as "one of the most promising young writers of his generation in depicting the homosexual life."² Cai Mengzhe commented:

Lin Youxuan specializes in the mastery of subtle language. He moves between the popular and the vulgar, the classical and the canonical, and is sharp and clever in his jokes, reflecting the concerns of the gay community and society in Taiwan while not forgetting to criticize and provoke the mainstream hetero-sexist society.³

Zai xuebaoxiagu zhong dengdai narrates Sylvain Tesson's experience on the Changtang (Qiangtang) Plateau⁴ in Tibet, China, in 2018 and 2019. At the invitation of his friend and professional animal photographer, Vincent Munier (b. 1976), Tesson joins an expedition, accompanied by Marie Amiguet (Munier's girlfriend) and Léo-Pol Jacquot (their assistant and former student of philosophy), to find and photograph the snow leopard. Starting on the inhospitable, icy high-altitude plains of the Himalayas in early February, the group awaits the appearance of the endangered snow leopard after reaching Snow Leopard Canyon, where they live in shacks and caves for three weeks. They take turns watching with

¹ <https://amzn.to/3r57oy6> 21 November 2021.

² <https://bit.ly/3si3uBf> (7 February 2022, my translation).

³ <https://bit.ly/3si3uBf> (7 February 2022, my translation).

⁴ The Qiangtang Plateau is the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau's largest endorheic area, the second largest lake area in China, and the highest inland lake area in the world with an area of 597,000 square kilometers, accounting for a quarter of the Plateau's total area. Administratively it is under the jurisdiction of the Tibet Autonomous Region's Naqu and Ali regions (<https://bit.ly/3nY2lNV> 26 January 2022; my translation).

binoculars and eventually see the elusive creature four times.

The Chinese translation features five parts – a Foreword, Part One: Approach, Part Two: Square, Part Three: Apparition, and Notes. In "Foreword" the author explains his encounter and friendship with Munier and describes how he acquires the art of patience. In parts One, Two, and Three, the author chronologically presents what he sees, hears, and ponders in this exceptional geographic space.

"Part One: Approach" concentrates on their journey from Yushu City¹ to Budong Quan 'Unfrozen Spring'² and eventually to Maoni Gu 'Yak Valley'. They encountered high-altitude wildlife along the route, including foxes, yaks, wolves, and kiangs.

In "Part Two: Square," the expedition moves west to Yaniuguole Lake and a mountain plain on the edge of the Qiangtang Plateau. Tesson ruminates philosophically in sub-sections including "Evolution of Space," "Uniqueness and Diversity," "Instinct and Reason," and "The Earth and Blood and Flesh." In "Part Three: Apparition," the book's climax, the group returns to Zadoi³ and revisits Snow Leopard Canyon, a journey imparting patience and its human value.

This adventure is described with a touch of personal affection and mystification. At the sight of the primeval Snow Leopard, Tesson relates this mystical creature to two important women in his life - his mother (Marie-Claude Tesson) and a girl he loved - "A lukewarm, white girl living in the Landes⁴ forest close to nature and his horses, which he did not know or could not keep by his side" (107, my translation).

The quest for the endangered snow leopard evokes Tesson's subconscious trauma and reminds him of losing the two women.

¹ Yushu City is located in the southwest of Qinghai Province, in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

² Budong Quan, Maoni Gu, and Yaniuguole Lake are fictitious names the author created to protect them from hunters.

³ Zadoi County, Yushu Prefecture.

⁴ A forest area bordering the Bay of Biscay in southwest France that extends north to the Garonne Estuary and south to the Adour River. Once a vast tract of marshland and moors, it includes the largest forest in France today.

Romanticism with strong literary sensibility and poetic nostalgia is evident in his recollection of this lost love. The sight of the snow leopard evokes his subconscious memories, the image of his ex-girlfriend and muse. A down-to-earth nature-lover and living far from the modern world deepens our understanding of Tesson's love for her and the similarities between her and the mysterious animal - both rare and precious, goddesses of Nature and peace. She lived in a self-built pine cabin on her own turf and was friendly with animals who accepted her. "She saved ants from a gutter, liberated snails trapped in thorns, and treated birds with injured wings" (105, my translation). Watching birds landing on her head, Tesson wondered, "Am I worthy of a woman birds alight on?" (109, my translation)

His memories flash by again, evoking his reflections on life and death:

Like a fleeting dream, this beast was the totem of the disappeared and deceased. My mother snatched away by death, the girl in the shady avenue, every and each apparition of this animal brought them back to me (174, my translation).

Tesson maintains his typical style of depth and philosophical contemplation, alluding to literary classics and historical figures from ancient Greek philosophers to postmodern deconstructionists elevating his writing to a higher philosophical plane, creating a literary feast for book lovers. At the same time, it presents challenges and may convey a sense of fragmentation to light-hearted readers. In their totality, his thoughts and allusions assist in constructing bio-ethical, anti-industrial, anti-modern, and agnostic views enabling him to forge a humanistic assault on man's non-humanistic destruction of himself.

Tesson reiterates how man enslaves Nature: "The world is going backward, and lives are leaving" (177, my translation). Facing our planet's decline of biodiversity and eco-crisis, Tesson worries that the world and human civilization will regress rather than move forward. As the human population increases and technology advances rapidly, he ironically predicts: "...the only promising prospect is we can have sex while eating insects in concrete boxes

with Wi-Fi" (177, my translation).

In the face of a degenerating world, politicians, scientists, and religious followers yearn for a better tomorrow, indifferent to the present moment. Contrary to such selfishness, Tesson calls on us to admire what is before us, "...to be content with the world and to fight for its survival" (180, my translation).

Readers are given a breathtaking picture of Snow Leopard Canyon, located in the Far East, seasoned with insightful commentary on modern civilization, man-nature relationships, and contradictions between degradation and technologization of the world. For example, when lamenting the domestication of wild yaks in the first chapter, Tesson compares the destiny of the animal with that of man:

Wild yaks are repositories of myth. State breeders sometimes captured a specimen to reproduce and reinvigorate the domestic generations. The fate of yaks resembles a modern fable: violence, strength, mystery, and glory flowing back into this mundane world. The urban man of this technologized Western world has also been domesticated. I confess that I am the most representative. Warmly cocooned in my apartment, obsessed with my electronic devices and busy recharging all the screens, I had given up the fire of living itself (39, my translation).

Tesson's self-reflection reminds us that leisure and patience have become rare luxuries in our hectic, noisy life. In a fast-paced society propelled by high technology, modern people experience enormous pressure to pursue worldly success, ignoring the beauty of poetry and Nature. At the sight of Tibetan animals, Tesson mocks man's indifference to the importance of life and liberty and revives the essence of romantic humanism.

In encountering the sheer magnitude of the natural environment, Tesson ponders the contradictions of human instinct and reason. For example, in Chapter Two, he comments:

Our cerebral cortex is a lethal weapon empowering us to do everything. We can force the world to submit to our intelligence; we can live in any natural environment of our choice.... our misfortune is that we cannot choose where to livewe are not deprived of instincts; instead, we

are encumbered with too many instincts.... Man suffers from his genetic indeterminacy: the price paid is indecision (84, my translation).

Exposing the Hamlet-like indecisiveness and vanity of human nature, the author expresses concern for man's future and suggests slowing down, waiting patiently, and discovering beauty in life as critical in resolving inner chaos.

Tesson, at times, employs his understanding of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism in his reflections, and sometimes humorously, e.g., "Tubo is a Garden of Eden installed with an air conditioner" (46, my translation). "...stepping cautiously, every bundle of muscles summoned, every movement balanced and mastered, a perfect demonstration of dynamic mechanics" (156, my translation).

Tesson dubs the snow leopard a female regent (121) and a perfect continuation of in-balance Yin and Yang. He also gives her masculinity and strength, characterizing her flawless mechanical instrumentality through vivid descriptions of her hunting: "This is how the snow leopard hunts: it pounces on its prey and bites down tightly..." (165, my translation).

Tibet's biodiversity features yaks, foxes, vultures, wolves, Tibetan snow-cocks, wild donkeys, antelopes, titmice, Tibetan gazelles, snow leopards, and other key protected wild animals in China. It is also a gathering ground of mysticism. For example, upon reaching sacred Yaniuguole Lake, Tesson comments, "Taoism is a Chinese worldview in a land of Buddhism. Taoism promotes inaction (doing nothing), whereas Buddhism promotes desirelessness" (79, my translation).

"Tao" forms the theoretical basis of Chinese mysticism with "nature and inaction" at the core of Taoism – "a deep ecology in its own right" (Dong and Yang 2008:202, my translation). Contrary to the wanton destruction of the natural environment and human disruption of the harmonious relationship between all things in Nature in modern society, Taoism and its egalitarian ethics interpret Nature holistically. In this vein, Tesson appeals for bonds between humans and animals by condemning hunters' evil actions.

Taoism abides by the rules of intuition. Tao is the origin of the universe, the master of human society. It emerged before all else. The essence of the Tao is pure and natural, to be free and unattached. In this sense, Tesson comprehends the gist of ancient Chinese philosophy that interprets the law of all living holistically and intuitively.

Tibet calms Tesson. Patiently waiting for the snow leopard brings self-reconciliation, and his alteration between motion and immobility flaunts an extraordinary way of life and spiritual heights.

Before this pilgrimage, Tesson regarded distance and motion as symbolic of life and living such that "...motionlessness was only regarded as a death rehearsal" (17, my translation). This journey upends this view. For just a glimpse of a snow leopard, Tesson and his companions must wait silently for hours without moving or making a sound, enduring the thin air and brutal cold. Their vigil becomes an act of faith since many have pursued the snow leopard for years in vain. Tesson gradually learns to embrace patience and silence as virtues as they keep watch. When the snow leopard, the holy spirit of the mountains, presents itself, Tesson realizes what we have lost in the modern world's commotion. The simple act of waiting proves to be an antidote to the frenzy of our times. He confides in an interview, "What travels can no longer give me what I should take from stillness – peace and tranquility."¹

The description of children in the Tibetan family Tesson and his team stay with at night add to an exotic picture of rare innocence and man being part of Nature. Gongba and other boys with "a wisp of snot from their nose and a smile on their lips" (151, my translation) are familiar with the high-altitude natural environment and spot the snow leopard immediately when Munier shows them a photo taken a few years earlier. A falcon in the photo is obvious, but Tesson and his team were unaware of the snow leopard in the photo.

The book's traditional Chinese character version is in vertical columns highlighting traditional Chinese culture. Lin adds numerous annotations and notes that give readers a better

¹ <https://bit.ly/3Idk2k3> 18 January 2022 (my translation).

understanding of the content and origins of the allusions Tesson uses in the context of Judeo-Christian and Greek-Roman literary traditions. Loyal to the original text, Lin employs his translator's skills and literary talent. For example, when describing passengers on a Paris suburban train, Tesson writes, "A group of handsome and mournful African Fulani knights" that Lin renders "a group of handsome African Don Quixote" (26, my translation) and explains: "the only possible allusion here is to Don Quixote's nickname 'The Bitter Face'" (210, my translation).

The acknowledged Chinese name of Tibet is Xizang, which Lin renders "Tubo," a term adopted by the Tibetan government-in-exile in the late twentieth century (6, my translation), and is unacceptable to mainland China readers.

This book provides perspectives on travel and the history and culture of the Tibetan region. Tibet, often imagined as a sacred place, has become an increasingly accessible and popular tourist destination. Tesson's interpretation of natural and humanistic aspects of Tibet that are absent from our daily lives seeks to satisfy spiritual needs. Reaching beyond the familiar format of American-style travel adventure with reflections on nature and philosophical lessons, tourists and nature explorers can now travel in Tibetan areas with Tesson.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Ali 阿里, mnga' ris མངའ་རིས།

Beijia'erhu yinju zhaji

贝加尔湖隐居札记

Budong Quan 不冻泉, mu tig

tshwa chu ལུ་ཏིག་ཇ་ཅུ།

Cai Mengzhe 蔡孟哲

Changtang, Qiangtang 羌塘,

byang thang བྱང་ཐང་།

Gongba 贡巴, mgon po

མགོན་པོ།

Lancang 澜沧, rdza chu ལྷ་ཅུ།

Liang Ruoyu 梁若瑜

Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋

Lin Youxuan 林佑轩

Maoniugu 牦牛谷

Naqu 那曲, nag chu ནག་ཅུ།

Qinghai 青海, mtsho sngon

མཚོ་ཐུན།

Tao 道

Tubo 吐蕃, thu b+hod ཐུ་བོད།

Wu Jing 吴晶

Xizang 西藏

Yaniuguole 雅牛果勒

Yushu 玉树, yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།

Zadoi 杂多, rdza stod ལྷ་སྟོད།

Zai Xiboliyasenlin zhong

在西伯利亚森林中

Zai Xuebaoxiagu zhong

dengdai 在雪豹峡谷中等
待

Zhaqu 札曲, rdza chu ལྷ་ཅུ།

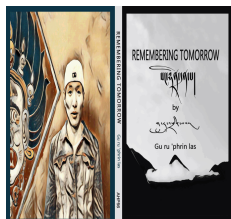
Zhao Junshuai 赵军帅

Zhou Peiqiong 周佩琼

REVIEW: *REMEMBERING TOMORROW* BY

GU RU 'PHRIN LAS ཀུ་རུ་འཕྱིན་ལས།

Reviewed by Lugyal Bum (Klu rgyal 'bum ལུགྱལ་པུམ། Lijiaben 李加本)*



Gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྱིན་ལས།. 2021. *Remembering Tomorrow*. <https://amzn.to/3yPRlrI>. 137pp, ASIN B09FLSKHND (Kindle 3.07 USD). KDP: <https://amzn.to/3RiWtM1>. 139pp, ISBN 139798468100134; ASIN B09F1FXT18 (paperback 6.13USD).

The retold memories of Gu ru 'phrin las' paternal grandmother and other family and community elders are *Remembering Tomorrow's* nineteen narratives, offering insight into premodern Tibetan herding culture and social life. Beyond their immense cultural preservation value, these narratives are powerfully recounted, presenting choices, views, and actions challenging us to make better decisions in our contemporary lives, wherever we may live.

These and many other stories nurturing Gu ru before he attended primary school were a much valued and frequent form of entertainment before electricity came to his natal community. Some narratives have open endings encouraging readers' imagination. I particularly enjoyed the first two stories ('You Are My Mother's Mother' and 'I'm Such a Horrible Person'), which made me eager to continue reading.

Cultural values, power, beliefs, love, betrayal, and hatred are interrogated, displaying past and contemporary local realities. Plato's oft-quoted, "The measure of a man is what he does with power," resonates with what certain characters in Gu ru's stories do with their influence. For example, in 'You are My Mother's Mother' a wealthy family forces Lha mo's family to pay for Dbang phyug's injury, and A mchod a lo manipulates his respected religious identity to punish Lha mo for rejecting a marriage proposal he supported. In 'Injustice', compensation is eight yaks for the death

* Lugyal bum (Klu rgyal 'bum, Lijiaben). 2023. Review: *Remembering Tomorrow* by Gu ru 'phrin las. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:488-490.

of a poor man, while it is eighty yaks for the death of a rich man. Such examples emphasize the precariousness of justice and compassion, and the challenges ordinary people face in a brutal world where they are often targets of the powerful and wealthy.

"People learn lessons the hard way" is appropriate for certain stories, e.g., what Lha mo might have felt and what she must deal with when she discovers her mother having an affair with her fiancé in 'Dilemma' - betrayed simultaneously by those she trusted and loved. Similarly, Rdor lo takes advantage of his parents' love to steal their sheep to pay his debts in 'Mirror'. What will this do to Rdor lo's father and their relationship? Betrayal from loved ones is painful but presents an opportunity to learn and limit the possibilities of facing similar future situations.

It is taboo for outsiders in certain Tibetan cultures to visit a family with a newborn in the belief that the baby is spiritually weak and visitors may bring "evil" that might harm the infant. 'I am Such a Horrible Person!' illustrates this concept with Tse ring blaming his cousin, Lha mo, for frightening his baby when she visited, so he ignores her when she comes again in harsh winter. Left outside, she freezes to death. Likewise, in 'Skin, Blood, Evil', a responsible, hardworking woman is blamed when there are few dairy products and infertility.

In 'The Lucky Leader and His Son' and 'The Shepherd', the perspectives of the lucky leader and the shepherd, Tshe don, illustrate "long-sighted and short-sighted views." The lucky leader believes his illiterate son, who never attended school, can "inherit" his position. This failure to appreciate change and the realities of new policies and more competitive candidates means the son fails to be the local leader his father promised. In contrast, the shepherd sacrifices lambs without hesitation because he understands it is the only way to save the mother ewes from death in harsh winter. The shepherd's many experiences dealing with difficult situations gave him the confidence to make such a difficult decision. At the same time, the lucky leader faced a situation with changing actualities and should have been able to make plans that would have proved more successful.

Gu ru's storytelling and writing skills create immersive and, at times, disquieting reading experiences. These stories are more than memories by inspiring us with choices, standpoints, and actions to make better life decisions and might also explain *Remembering Tomorrow*. Readers interested in Tibetan culture and Tibetan pastoral society will benefit from this book.

TIBETAN TERMS

a mchod a lo ཨ་མཚན་ཨ་ལོ།

dbang phyug དབང་ཕྱུག།

gu ru ཀུ་རུ།

gu ru 'phrin las ཀུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

lha mo ལྷ་མོ།

Lugyal Bum, klu rgyal 'bum ལྷ་རྒྱལ་འབུམ།

rdor lo རྡོ་ལོ།

tse ring ཚེ་རིང་།

tshe don ཚེ་དོན།

CHINESE TERM

Lijiaben 李加本

REVIEW: *STORIES OF MY LIFE AND HOME* BY

'JAM DBYANGS BKRA SHIS འཇམ་དབང་འཁྲུག་ཤིས།

Reviewed by Lugyal Bum (Klu rgyal 'bum ལུགཡལ་འུམ། Lijiaben 李加本)*



'Jam dbyangs bkra shis འཇམ་དབང་འཁྲུག་ཤིས།. 2021. *Stories of My Life and Home*. 2 maps, 23 B&W illustrations. Amazon KDP. <https://tinyurl.com/2xxp5snz>. 137pp. ISBN-13, 979-8470433923, ASIN B09FCFP2FL (paperback 5.68USD).

Stories of My Life and Home features twenty-two narratives of memories, magic realism, and experiences rooted in Tibetan traditional pastoral life as it rapidly transitions from tent-living to permanent housing with easy access to urban settings and emerging new digital technologies. 'Jam dbyangs bkra shis's (b. 1994) collection is mostly based in Mdo ba (Duowa) Town, Reb gong (Tongren) County, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China, and on his continuing multifaceted life journey and experiences with education.

Daily communication with his family in 'A Day' and on pilgrimage ('My First Pilgrimage') with his maternal grandmother when he was very young depicts 'Jam dbyangs in a close relationship with his family members. How will urbanization and modernization influence such family relationships?

Born in a family of yak and sheep herders, 'Jam dbyangs began tending his family's sheep at age six. At age eleven, an attempt was made to enroll him in a local government primary school. His father was critical of such education and had resisted 'Jam dbyangs' earlier pleas to attend school, reminiscent of Tara Westover's experiences as recounted in *Educated: A Memoir*. Later, when 'Jam dbyangs' father relented and took him to enroll, he could not register because his name was absent from the family's *hukou*

* Lugyal Bum (Klu rgyal 'bum, Lijiaben). 2023. Review: *Stories of My Life and Home* by 'Jam dbyangs bkra shis. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 63:491-494.

'official registration document'. His family had deliberately not included him to avoid fines under the One Child Policy.

The following year, 'Jam dbyangs' parents and paternal grandmother escorted him to Bla brang Monastery to become a monk. After seven years of Tibetan monastic education, he became a layman and attended private schools in Mtsho sngon and Lha sa to study Chinese and English.

The book features a preface (by filmmaker Khashen Gyal) and the author's introduction, followed by five themed sections that the author describes as:

The first three are about culture and religion, including demons, ghosts, and deities. ... Part Four concerns social issues created by social media. Part Five consists of stories related to my friends, my family members, and myself (17).

These materials offer an understanding of 'Jam dbyangs' life with his family and community. A recurrent theme is how lives are affected by the supernatural, vividly illustrated by three stories in Part One that retell his grandfather's (1940-2022) stories. Ghosts and demons seem real, given the cultural context. For example, 'A Demon Monk' describes how a monk became a demon after abandoning his religious practice and endangering local monasteries, exemplifying how hatred and regret transform men into evil entities while foreshadowing the author's bizarre night experience in a hotel ('Room 204').

Part Two continues with supernatural experiences. 'The Power of Belief' and 'A Marriage' deal with marriage and supernatural beings reflecting the role of power and wealth in marriage. The third story in Part Two, 'The Sickness Causing Demon', involves seeking a demon that causes sickness and finding and killing it.

Part Three stories are associated with historical events, consequences of inappropriate religious rituals, and the power of an amulet. Before 1950, many Tibetans suffered from the rule of Ma Bufang (1903-1975). For example:

In the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Ma Bufang launched seven expeditions into the Golog region of Tibet, slaughtering ethnic

Tibetans and destroying Tibetan Buddhist temples in Tibet as well as in his home province of Qinghai (<https://bit.ly/3weCsol> 19 August 2022).

A Tibetan man in 'The Power of Religion' ended his life for defending Bla brang Monastery and its monks from Ma Bufang's violence. It seems he was committed to chasing and destroying the enemies who attacked the monastery, even if it meant he might lose his life. The second story, 'A *Lha Ba*' demonstrates a family's chronic misfortunes from not regularly making offerings to mountain deities.

"An Amulet" stresses the power of an amulet, the value of wearing one, and what may happen when it is lost, leaving its owner unprotected, e.g., a notorious bandit loses his amulet and is quickly killed.

Part Four features real-life stories of Tibetan nomads, inappropriate education, and the impact of rapidly changing digital technology. Urbanization and economic development encouraging people to have a town/city life since at least about 2010, have encouraged Tibetan herders to move to urban areas where they lack the requisite skills to subsist. 'Moving & A Story' describes such a family and related challenges.

Digital media is a convenient tool offering new forms of communication and entertainment, but it is a double-edged sword, destroying lives when misused. Broken marriages and families in 'WeChat Crimes,' addiction to video games, and bad tempers in 'WeChat Games' and 'Darling Child' are examples of sad outcomes.

'Jam dbyangs shares his unusual education journey and life transitions from child to respected monk to layman in 'Karma', critically reflecting that in the eyes of local Tibetans, what he wears matters more than the person.

In Part Five, the narrator follows a *bla ma's* advice and attends a private school in Lha sa where a friend drowns in a local river ('My Dear Friend'), an experience that continues to haunt, reemerging in "Room 204."

I recommend this collection of stories to anyone interested in learning more about supernatural beings and ghosts in the Tibetan cultural context and how urban development and advanced

digital technology impact contemporary Tibetan society. Recent transformations in Tibetan society are rarely presented in stories, thus providing an opportunity to grasp aspects of such changes from a young man's experience.

REFERENCE

Westover, Tara. 2018. *Educated: A Memoir*. New York: Random House.

TIBETAN TERMS

'jam dbyangs འཇམ་དབྱངས།

'jam dbyangs bkra shis

འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།

Khashen Gyal, mkha' byams

rgyal མཁའ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།

lha sa ལྷ་ས།

Lugyal Bum, klu rgyal 'bum

ལུ་རྒྱལ་འབུམ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

CHINESE TERMS

Duowa 多哇

hukou 户口

Lijiaben 李加本

Tongren 同仁

TIBETAN FILM ALERTS

<https://zenodo.org/record/8054635>

A THOUSAND-FOLD OFFERING RITUAL

by Gser mo mtsho གསེར་མོ་མཚོ།

19 June 2023

A Thousand-Fold Offering Ritual was held by monks at my home in Ban ser Community, Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township, Mang rdzong (Guinan) County, Mstho Lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mstho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China on Thursday, May 25, 2023. This involved offering butter lamps, holy water, incense, prostrations, and circumambulation, with each activity being performed a thousand times.

Stong mchod is an important spiritual practice helping practitioners overcome fears and attachments, purify negative karma, and develop compassion and wisdom. The primary purpose of this ritual was to assist my sick grandmother, a devout Buddhist. Despite receiving medical treatment, her condition did not improve, so my family sought hope and healing from religious practice. My family invited six monks from Klu tshang Monastery to conduct the ritual. My family gave 300 RMB and offered *kha btags* 'strip of silk'. The total cost of the ritual was approximately 4,000 RMB.

TIBETAN TERMS

ban ser བན་སེར།

klu tshang ལྷ་ཚང་།

kha btags ཁ་བརྟག་པ།

mang rdzong མང་རྫོང་།

mgo mang མགོ་མང་།

mtso lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtso sngon མཚོ་སྒྲོན།

sha rgya ཤ་རྒྱ།

stong mchod ཐོང་མཚོད།

CHINESE TERMS

Guinan 贵南

Guomaying 过马营

Hainan 海南

<https://archive.org/details/pilgrimage-to-khri-ka-by-gser-mo-mtsho>

PILGRIMAGE TO KHRI KA

by Gser mo mtsho གསེར་མོ་མཚོ།

19 June 2023, 15'02"

On Monday, May 22, 2023, I used an iPhone 12 Pro Max to record the pilgrimage of my grandmother, Kar mo rgyal (b. 1937); mother, Rgya kho (b. 1964); and one of my uncles to the Jo jo lha khang (Zhenzhu si) and Lha kar po (Zhangfo si), located in Khri Ka (Guide) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. Our journey started at our home in Ban ser Community, Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township, Mang rdzong (Guinan) County, approximately 65 km from Khri ka. We went there in my uncle's vehicle.

My grandmother married Bsod noms when she was 16. They divorced when she was 23. She remarried at the age of 25 and had four children. My grandmother has suffered from high blood pressure, causing hearing loss and headaches, since mid-April 2023. My family members thought going on pilgrimage might lessen her suffering and make her feel better spiritually. Thus, we decided to visit those two religious sites in Khri ka.

My grandmother fell ill the day before we left, and my family stayed up all night caring for her. To her delight, my grandmother's hearing improved the day after the pilgrimage, and her headaches vanished. She credits this improvement to Buddha's positive intervention, believing that the monastery visits played a crucial role. She also fulfilled her wish to circumambulate those temples.

TIBETAN TERMS

ban ser བན་སེར།

bsod noms བསོད་ནམས།

gser mo mtsho གསེར་མོ་མཚོ།

jo jo lha khang རྫོ་རྫོ་ལྷ་ཁང།

kar mo rgyal ཀར་མོ་རྒྱལ།

khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

lha kar po ལྷ་ཀར་པོ།

mang rdzong མང་རྫོང།

mgo mang མགོ་མང།

mtho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ

Guide 贵德

Hainan 海南

CHINESE TERMS

Qinghai 青海

Zhenzhu si 珍珠寺

Zhangfo si 长佛寺

3

<https://archive.org/details/sonny-80-year-old-celebration>

AN EIGHTY-YEAR CELEBRATION FOR A STAG MA

TIBETAN MAN by Bkra shis rgya mtsho འཇམ་ཤིས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

21 March 2023, 1.05:36

On Saturday, January 21, 2023, an 80-year celebration was held for Stag ma, the 30th day of the 12th lunar month, 2022. From 9 AM to 2 PM, I participated in the celebration, which was held in #1, Wa shur Village, Thang mgo (Tanggu) Town, 'Ba' rdzong (Tongde) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China.

Photographer, writer, editor: Bkra shis rgya mtsho (Zhaxijiancuo 扎西尖措) using an iPhone 12 Pro Max.

The main character

Stag ma (Stag phrug thar) was born in 1944 in #3 Brigade Klu lung Village. When he was 18, he married Rin chen mtsho (Ri mtsho, b. 1942) and moved to #1 Brigade Wa shur Village. They had three children: Dga' rab rdo rje (b. 1964), Rdo rje sgröl ma (b. 1968), and Phur ba skyabs (b. 1980). Stag ma lived with his younger son's (Phur ba skyabs) family. Stag ma is my (Bkra shis rgya mtsho) maternal uncle. He was a locally famous hunter.

Eighty-year celebration

Historically and locally, there were four celebration parties during a person's life – a birthday party, a 3-year-old haircutting party, a wedding party, and an 80-year celebration. On the day of the last

celebration, on the 1st, 3rd, or 13th day of the 1st lunar month, the celebrant gets up in the early morning, shaves, cuts their hair, washes their face, and puts on such new clothes as a blue sash, a white shirt, a white felt or fox-fur hat, a traditional lambskin or sheepskin robe, and Tibetan-style leather boots. They prepare to welcome visitors before sunrise when neighbors send New Year gifts.

Parents tell their children to ask the celebrant for good wishes and longevity blessings. Tea bricks, white silk scarves, Tibetan cakes, and *rgyal bo* bread are typical gifts. The 8-year-old typically exchanges a silk scarf with those bringing gifts, signifying, "I give my age to you, and may you live 100 years.

"Traditionally, neighbors, close friends, sworn brothers, and close relatives attended this celebration. Historically, such celebrations were rare, but they are more common today, thanks to longer life spans.

Family condition

Stag ma's family at the time of the celebration included Rin chen mtsho (Ri mtsho, b. 1942), Stag ma (b. 1944), Phur ba skyabs (b. 1980), daughter-in-law (Mtsho skyid yag, b.1977), grandson (Gsang bdag rdo rje, b. 1998), granddaughter (Bsod noms dbang mo, b. 2000), granddaughter (Chos mtsho yag, b.2002), and grandson ('Jam dbyangs rig pa'i rdo rje, b. 2009). The family had 700 *mu* (46.9 hectares) of winter pasture, 86 *mu* (5.8 hectares), 20 *mu* (1.3 hectares) of cultivated fields in the summer pasture, 220 sheep, 100 yaks, two horses, vehicles (Ford. a Toyota taxi, a truck), two 豪爵 magnate, a bungalow (9.9*5.9 sq.m., 19.8* 22 sq.m. yard) in Wa shur Village, a bungalow (9.9*5.9 sq.m., 19.8* 22 sq.m. yard) at Kho rgya New Village, and an 84 square meter apartment in the local 'Ba' rdzong (Tongde) New County Town.

Preparation and expenditure

A Mongolian sheepskin robe from Sog rdzong County (Henan), Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture for Stag ma cost 10,000 RMB. Seven sheep carcasses (0.5 kg of mutton cost 31 RMB for a total mutton cost of ~ 13,000 RMB, 300 tea bricks

at 25 RMB each (7,500 RMB), and apples, oranges, jujube, persimmons, plums, mangoes, vegetables, candies, and other items totaling ~10,000 RMB.

Twenty days before the celebration day, family members were busy preparing. Neighbors came to help fry bread, prepare dumplings and Tibetan cakes, and send oral WeChat invitations to the village WeChat group, the tribe's tantric monk groups (a son is a tantric monk), and certain relatives in other villages. Thirty-four monks and Tantric monks, all from the same tribe, joined the party to chant from 9:30 AM to 2 PM. The host family gave each monk 100 RMB, a tea brick, and a white silk scarf. All attendees, except the monks, presented gifts of a tea brick and white scarf. An estimated 400 attendees were at the celebration. Attendees gave cash gifts ranging from 50-2,000 RMB and such items as bottles of liquor, Tibetan cakes, tea bricks, Tibetan woolen items, hand prayer wheels, and traditional scripture volumes. The total cost of the celebration was 40,000 RMB. The value of the gifts was 35,000 RMB.

Appreciation

Thanks to Stag ma son (Dga' rab rdo rje, a Tantric monk, b. 1944) and grandson (Gsang bdag rdo rje, b. 1998) for providing information.

TIBETAN TERMS

'ba' rdzong འབའ་རྫོང་།

'jam dbyangs rig pa'i rdo

rje འཇམ་དབྱངས་རིག་པའི་རྫོང་།

bkra shis rgya mtsho

བཀ་ཤིས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

bsod nams dbang mo

བསོད་ནམས་དབང་མོ།

chos mtsho yag ཚས་མཚོ་ཡག

dga' rab rdo rje དགའ་རབ་རྫོང་།

gsang bdag rdo rje

གསང་བདག་རྫོང་།

kho rgya ཁ་རྒྱ།

klu lung ལུ་ལུང་།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho skyid yag མཚོ་སྐྱིད་ཡག

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

phur ba skyabs ཕུར་བ་སྐམས།

rdo rje sgröl ma རྫོང་རྒྱལ་མ།

ri mtsho རི་མཚོ།

rin chen mtsho རིན་ཆེན་མཚོ།	Hainan 海南
rma lho ར་ལྷོ།	Haojue 豪爵
sog rdzong སོག་རྫོང་།	Henan 河南
stag ma གྷག་མ།	Huangnan 黄南
stag phrug thar གྷག་ཕུག་ཐར།	mu 亩
thang mgo ཐང་མགོ།	Qinghai 青海
wa shur ར་ཤུར།	Tanggu 唐谷
	Tongde 同德
CHINESE TERMS	Zhaxijiancuo 扎西尖措

4

<https://archive.org/details/glory-to-the-deities>

GLORY TO THE DEITIES!

by 'Jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐལ་བཟང་། (Jiayangjian 加羊尖)

30 March 2023, 57'06"

'Jam dbyangs skyabs (Jambo, b. 1997) made this film on 21 September 2022. The film begins with Jambo in a car heading to the family pasture to pick up milk in Skya ga 'Magpie' Valley, Khang sar Township, in the south of Gcig sgril County, about fifty kilometers from the county town. The family will offer a one-day meal for *dbyar gnas*[1] 'summer retreat' to Stag lung dgon ka dag spros bral gling Monastery in Stag lung Valley, Khang sar Township in the south of Gcig sgril County, six kilometers from the county town.

Three Tibetan women who began milking yaks at six AM are featured. Moonlight helps them see as they milked yaks for two hours.

While women were milking the yaks, Jambo chatted with the women. One talked about a dream she had. The women talked about livestock, such as an orphan calf and twin milking yaks.

When they were about to finish milking, the younger woman's husband got up, dressed his son, and took him to the yak enclosure so he could see medicating the calves. They also ear-tagged the calves.

Medicating calves and milking the yaks finished at the same time.

A woman drove the milking yaks from the yak enclosure to graze.

An older woman poured all the milk into a big plastic container and put it in the car. When they noticed an airplane, they yelled, "See, there's an airplane!"

None of the three women had traveled by air or train, so seeing an airplane above them was exciting.

A man drove the car with three men to Mtha' ba 'community near the monastery' where they boiled the milk.

They needed to make an offering the next day of a one-day meal, so they took the milk to the monastery's big kitchen and prepared *dbyar gnas*. They cleaned the kitchen when they finished and went to the assembly hall to listen to *bla ma* and monks chanting. The *dge skos* 'monastic disciplinarian' gave them *mdud pa* 'holy knots', a large piece of yellow silk, a picture of a local *bla ma*, and *ril bu* 'holy pills' (containing sacred substances blessed by a *bla ma* and monks).

In the end, they went to offer incense. The monastery restricts tossing *rlung rta* 'wind horses'¹ while offering incense. Instead, they flung liquor skyward.

Women make a huge contribution in preparing milk and butter. Cooking *dbyar gnas*² is a men's thing. Women are not allowed to enter the monastery's big kitchen nor offer incense. No local woman would say, "I want to cook *dbyar gnas*. You men milk the yaks."

Women accept cooking *dbyar gnas* as a male duty and milking yaks in the early morning as a female duty.

During *dbyar gnas*, women, including nuns, are forbidden to enter monasteries.

Men offer incense while shouting, "Glory to the deities!"

¹ For more on *rlung rta*, see <https://bit.ly/3QmVxGi> 8 January 2023.

² For more on *dbyar gnas*, see <https://bit.ly/3vHIXbo> 7 January 2023.

TIBETAN TERMS

'jam dbyangs skyabs

འཇམ་དབང་སྐུ་བས།

bla ma ལྷ་མ།

dbyar gnas དབྱར་གནས།

dge skos དགེ་སྐོས།

gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།

khang sar ཁང་སར།

mdud pa མདུད་པ།

mtha' ba མཐའ་བ།

ril bu རིལ་བུ།

rlung rta རྩུང་རྟ།

skya ga སྐྱ་ག།

stag lung dgon ka dag spros

bral gling

སྐྱ་ལུང་དགོན་ཀྱི་དག་སྐྱོས་བའ་སྒོང་།

5

https://archive.org/details/Mdo_ba_Township_Town_Reb_gong

MDO BA TOWNSHIP TOWN, TONGREN COUNTY,
RMA LHO TIBETAN AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE,
MSTHO SNGON PROVINCE, PR CHINA

by Chos skyong skyabs ཚོས་སྐྱོང་སྐུ་བས།

2019, 10'22"

Now a town, this film shows the Town Center and surrounding areas during a time of rapid social transformation in this pastoral area.

མཚོ་སྐོན་ཞིང་ཆེན་ཆུ་སྐོར་དང་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ་གྱི་ཐུན་རིན་ཚོང་མདོ་བ་ཁང་།

Mdo ba Township Town, Tongren County, Rma lho Tibetan
Autonomous Prefecture, Mstho sngon Province, PR China

6

<https://archive.org/details/g.yang-res-skyid-mends-slightshot>

G.YANG RES SKYID MENDS A TIBETAN
SLIGHTSHOT IN MGO LOG (GOLOK) by

'Jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབང་སྐུ་བས། (Jiayangjian 加羊尖)

17 January 2023, 6'32"

This video was made on 15 January 2023. G.yang res skyid lives in her family's winter pasture, Rdo ra Valley, Gsa' skor Tribe, Khang sar Township Town, Gcig sgril County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province, RP China.

G.yang res skyid (b. 1990) mends her slingshot with *rtsid skud* 'thread' (yarn made of coarse yak hair). She spins thread using a "chopstick" spindle and starts sewing her slingshot.

G.yang res skyid never attended school. The oldest of four children, her parents kept her at home because they needed her help to look after their livestock. Her two younger sisters went to school, and her younger brother became a monk at six, which was her parents' and grandparents' idea: "Ye shes bzang po (b. 1996) is the only son, so he should become a monk."

G.yang res skyid has three children and has spent her entire life on her family's pastures, rarely leaving her local home community. Her hard work for her family is impressive! Herding livestock and doing house chores are work she never complains about.

G.yang res skyid sewing her slingshot was not a performance. She is accustomed to sewing with *rtsid skud*. Nowadays, people buy all kinds of "thread," but *rtsid skud* is not on that list. More importantly, few people now sew things by themselves.

G.yang res skyid is one of the few people who try to be self-sufficient and not rely on others. When G.yang res skyid discovered her slingshot was torn, she thought of mending it and not buying a new one.

7

<https://archive.org/details/dolmas-film>.

MILKING TIBETAN YAKS, MAKING BUTTER AND
CHEESE 2022, G.YANG SHAR (YAXIU) VILLAGE
G.YU DKA' 'OM LUNG (YIKEWULAN) TOWNSHIP,
RKANG TASHA (GANGCHA) COUNTY, PR CHINA by

Sgrol ma lha mo སྒྲོལ་མ་ལ་མོ་ (Zhuo ma la mao 卓玛拉毛; Dolma Lha mo)
2022 14'38"

Filmed in G.yang shar (Yaxiu) Village G.yu dka' 'om lung (Yikewulan) Township, Rkang tasha (Gangcha) County, China. Women milk yaks and make butter and cheese in summer. Filmed by Dol ma lha mo (Dloma Lhamo) 10 July 2022.

<https://archive.org/details/yul-shul-film-2022>

THANG SKYID VILLAGE, 'BA' DGON TOWNSHIP,
CHU DMAR LEB COUNTY, YUL SHUL TIBETAN
AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE, MTSO SNGON
(QINGHAI) PROVINCE, PR CHINA

by Bkra shis rab rgyas བརྒྱ་ཤིས་རབ་རྒྱལ།

31 December 2022, 13'37"

Filmed in Thang skyid Village, 'Ba' dgon Township, Chu dmar leb County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China, featuring yaks on the grassland. Collecting caterpillar fungus near the Yangtse River. Filmed by Bkra shis rab rgyas, 20 June 2022.

<https://archive.org/details/yul-shul-tibetan-autonomous-prefecture-2022>

MAKE OFFERINGS TO THE HIGH GODS AND GIVE
ALMS TO THE LOW SIX BEINGS - YUL SHUL 2022
YAR DKON MCHO G LA MCHOD PA MAR RIGS DRUG

LA SBYIN PA ཡར་དཀོན་མཆོག་ལ་མཆོད་པ་མར་རིགས་དྲུག་ལ་བྱིན་པ།

by Bkra shis rab rgyas བརྒྱ་ཤིས་རབ་རྒྱལ།

2022, 6'02"

On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month (Tibetan Calendar) in our community (Thang skyid (Tongji) Village, 'Ba' dgon (Bagan) Township, Chu dmar leb (Qumalai) County, Yul shul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China) local people chanted scriptures more than usual, went to 'Ba' dgon (Bagan) Township Town, and circumambulated the stupas there. It is also a time when some in Yul shul Prefecture buy fish from Chinese people and put them in the 'Bri chu (Yangtze River), or other rivers, buy livestock (set them free and never kill them), give money to beggars, put the fish they buy into rivers, and give food to homeless dogs.

This is *yar dkon mchog la mchod pa mar ri drug la spyin pa*.

A monk relative instructed us in Thang skyid to make small balls with *rtsam pa*. He also asked Mother to add fresh milk to the small balls of *rtsam pa*. After he finished chanting at the 'Bri chu, we made a yak-dung fire and added juniper. After chanting for a few minutes, the monk poured milk into a plate with small *rtsam pa* balls and poured the plate's contents into the 'Bri chu.

10

<https://archive.org/details/traditional-tibetan-wedding-copy>

A TRADITIONAL TIBETAN WEDDING

by Bkra shis rgya mtsho བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ (Zhaxijiancuo 扎西尖措)

January 28, 2021-February 10, 2022, 2 hours, 28 minutes

Bkra shis rgya mtsho used an iPhone 12 Pro Max)

Part-One

This documentary focuses on a traditional wedding celebration in a herding family at 35 °9'45" latitude, 100°26'22" longitude, 3,351 MASL in #3 Brigade, Hwo thog sum dbrag Valley, Klu lung Village, Thang mgo (Tanggu) Town, 'Ba' rdzong (Tongde) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. I participated throughout the 14-day celebration.

On the 5th day of the first lunar month, 2022, a celebration was held for the groom, Bdud mgon skyabs, and the bride, Choe bzang sgrol ma.

In the early 2020s, most locals held weddings in 'Ba' rdzong County Town restaurants. However, some families divided into two groups. One group held a wedding celebration at home in the traditional way, and the other held a wedding celebration in a restaurant. This family held wedding celebrations at home.

Main Characters

Bdud mgon skyabs (b. 1995) in Klu lung Village. In 2019, he graduated from Mtsho sngon Normal University and taught Tibetan at 'Od gsal Tibetan Primary School, 'Od gsal Township, Dar legs County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

Choe bzang sgrol ma (b.1996) Dung dkar Village, Tang mgo Town graduated in 2018 from Mtsho sngon Normal University and taught mathematics at 'Ba' rdzong Boarding Primary School, 'Ba' rdzong County Town.

Family Members

Bdud mgon skyabs is my maternal cousin. His family has ten members: his father (Smin grol, Ngag dbang smin grol, b.1965), mother (Skal khao, Skal bzang sgrol ma, b. 1970), uncle (Blo bzang tshul khirms, b. 1971, a Bde chen Monastery monk), older brother (Blo bzang dpal ldan (b. 1992), sister-in-law (Bsod nams sgrol ma (b. 1992, from Rgya bo Village, Tang mgo Town), younger sister (Ye shes mtsho (b. 1996, graduated from Mtsho sngon Qaidam (Chaidamu) Vocational and Technical College in 2019), nephew (Yum skyabs rgyal, b. 2016), and Tshe dpal mkhar (b. 2018).

Family Conditions

The family has 370 mu (24.66 hectares) of winter pasture, 17 mu (1.13 hectares) of summer pasture, 14 mu (hectares 0.93) of farmland, 80 yaks, 100 sheep, a black goat, a brown dog, a black cat, vehicles (Rongwie 360, Lifan 330), 2 motorcycles (Qianjiang, Wuyangbentian), a 3-wheel agriculture vehicle, a walking tractor crusher, two greenhouses (108m² and 82m²), a 132m² flat on the winter pasture, and a bungalow (9.9*5.9m², 19.8* 22m² yard), and an 84m² apartment in 'Ba' rdzong New County Town.

Preparation and expenditure

Months before the wedding celebrations, a local tailor was located and asked to sew traditional garments such as lambskin robes for the new couples. Ornaments, for example, a 60g gold necklace, a

coral necklace, a pair of 9g gold earrings, a gold finger ring, a silver milk bucket holder, a teardrop-shaped silver panel, and a hair-ornament were bought for the bride in the local County Town market for approximately 47,000 RMB and paid by the groom's family.

After preparations, the groom's father and one of his cousins brought items for the bride, including a lambskin robe, a cloth robe, a hat, and ornaments. Because of local community rules, these items and did not exceed 3,013 RMB cash (the brideprice), 13 bottles of liquor, three large pieces of silk/cloth (the size of a traditional Tibetan robe), and a white silk scarf.

Other expenses (RMB):

Mutton	3,550
Plates 1	215
Tables	1,600
Beverages (liquor, non-alcoholic drinks, red wine)	5,065
Fruit	380
Granulated sugar	120
Vegetables and noodles	150
Metal stove	1,360
Coal	140

Total 13,580 RMB

January 28, 2021, neighbors and relatives came to help, including Tshe ring sgrol ma, TA re, Phag mo, Bde skyid 'tsho, Sgrol ma yag, Chos thar rgyal, Lha snang rgyal, Nyi ma lha mo, 'Bum phyug skyid, Dbang kho, Tshul rnam, and Rta kho. They chopped 50 kg of meat to make boiled dumplings and steamed stuffed buns. Family members were busy making red bread, Tibetan cakes, and boiling mutton for displays on tables in front of guests. Blo bzang dpal ldan was busy with other men operating the 3-wheeler to borrow tea tables, carpets, seat cushions, chairs, plates, and white fabric tents from neighbors.

Participants in the wedding celebrations included

representatives from 199 households (255 people). 113 households from the local village sent representatives, Klu lung Village 86 households from different villages, including Rgya bo, Dang po, Ho thog, Wa shur, Tho si, Rde'u dkar, Gle ba, the groom's classmates, and 16 households sent gifts of red packet money through WeChat.

Attendees gave cash gifts ranging from 50-1,500 RMB and such items as bottles of liquor, Tibetan cakes, boxes of biscuits, Tibetan wool items, and white silk scarves. The total cost of the celebration was approximately 63,580 RMB. The value of the gifts was about 31,250 RMB.

Part-Two

Wedding Celebrations

There are two types of local marriage patterns: arrangement and romantic marriage. In the past, most children followed their parents' marriage arrangements. Parents thus had a significant obligation to choose suitable spouses for their children, particularly the bride for their son, and hold auspicious wedding celebrations showcasing the family's position in the community. Parents considered their children's marriage before the age of fifteen. Important concerns in choosing their children's spouses included pure bones (no body odor) and family protector deity (between different tribes, offerings to different protector deities were thought to bring misfortune). The last taboo concerns the harmony of zodiac animals. Therefore, according to traditional divination: the following pairs conflict, tiger-monkey, hare-rooster, dragon-dog, snake-pig, horse-rat, and sheep-cow. The harmonious pairs included pig-sheep-hare, dog-horse-tiger, rooster-cow-snake, and rat-dragon-monkey.

On the wedding day, a woman was chosen to offer tea in front of the bride at the yak enclosure, and another woman took the bride's horse reins. The contemporary version of this is a woman who touched the bride's hat and tied a white-silk scarf to the driver's side car mirror of the car with the bride). This woman was chosen according to the zodiac animal concerns mentioned above.

Parents investigated the background of the bride's family and chose an eloquent matchmaker from their relatives or community to ask the bride's parents and their elder relatives if they agreed to their child's marriage. Both sides consulted local religious leaders to divine or astrologers to examine zodiac-animal compatibility.

On the wedding day, relatives participated in congratulating the new couple. Meanwhile, relatives pitched a new black yak hair tent for the couple, collected items, especially furniture, and gave the new couple yaks, sheep, and horses.

Recently, most marriage partners have chosen free-choice marriage. On this wedding day in the early morning, after chanting the ritual of family deities to expel misfortune by the family ritual specialist, Rang gsal, the groom and 3 escorts visited the bride's home and soon returned. The bride, with 14 escorts, then came to the groom's home. A singer sang a traditional song to welcome the bride and escorts. After several minutes, the escorts and the groom's side women engaged in several rounds of antiphonal singing. When escorts were ready to leave, the family host gave each 200 RMB in cash and a white silk scarf.

Part-Three

After the wedding

After the wedding celebration, family members and some neighbors busily returned items borrowed from neighbors. On February 10, 2022, four escorts (including the bride's father and the bride) brought the dowry to her family and relatives, who gave her such items as lambskin robes, sheepskin robes, Tibetan wool robes, 2 cloth robes, 3 sashes, 3 traditional shirts, a 2g gold necklace, gold earrings, a 3g gold ring, silver necklace, diamond necklace, and shoes. The bride's clothes were put on a line in the enclosure to display to neighbors and participants. The bride's gifts such as fruit, Tibetan cakes, and biscuits were divided among participants.

The bride's father offered liquor three times to the air. He praised all deities in his family and said, "I'm so glad our children

do not choose external spouses - particularly different religious believers. At contemporary schools, some children choose to marry partners from different ethnicities. I have nothing to say about my daughter's choice. I definitely agree with this wedding."

After this day, neighbors and relatives invited the bride to their home and gave presents. Most families gave 100-300 RMB. According to local custom, the neighbors and relatives first invited the bride. Afterward, she could visit their families randomly.

Acknowledgment

My cousins, Blo bzang dpal ldan and Bdud mgon skybs, and my maternal uncle (Smin grol) provided information that helped complete this film and documentation. .

TIBETAN TERMS

'ba' rdzong འབའ་རྫོང་།

'bum phyug skyid འབམ་ཕྱུག་སྦྱིད་།

'od gsal འོད་གསལ།

bde chen བདེ་ཆེན།

bde skyid 'tsho བདེ་སྦྱིད་མཚོ།

bdud mgon skyabs བདུད་མགོན་སྦྱུང་མཁའ་།

bkra shis rgya mtsho བརྒྱ་ཤིས་རྒྱལ་མཚོ།

blo bzang dpal ldan ལྷོ་བཟང་དཔལ་ལྷན་།

blo bzang tshul khrim ལྷོ་བཟང་ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་།

bsod nams sgrol ma བསོད་ནམས་སྒྲོལ་མ།

choe bzang sgrol ma ཚེས་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ།

chos thar rgyal ཚེས་ཐར་རྒྱལ་།

dang po དང་པོ།

dar legs དར་ལགས།

dbang kho དབང་ཁོ།

dung dkar དུང་དཀར།

gle ba གླེ་བ།

ho thog ཧོ་ཐོག་།

hwo thog sum dbrag ཧོ་ཐོག་སུམ་དབྱེག་།

klu lung ལྷུ་ལུང་།

lha snang rgyal ལྷ་སྤང་རྒྱལ་།

mgo log མགོ་ལོག་།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན་།

ngag dbang smin grol འག་དབང་སྒྲིན་གྲོལ་།

nyi ma lha mo ཉི་མ་ལྷ་མོ།

phag mo ཕག་མོ།

rang gsal རང་གསལ།

rde'u dkar རེབ་དཀར།

rdo mo རོ་མོ།

rgya bo རྒྱལ་བོ།

rta kho རྟ་ཁོ།

sgrol ma yag སྒྲོལ་མ་ཡག་།

skal bzang sgrol ma སྐལ་བཟང་སྒྲོལ་མ།

skal khao སྐལ་ཁོ།

smin grol སྦྱིན་གྲོལ་།

tA re ཏ་རེ།

thang mgo ཐང་མགོ།

tho si ཐོ་སི།

tshe dpal mkhar རྩོམ་པ་མཁར།
tshe ring sgrol ma རྩོམ་རིང་སྒྲོལ་མ།
tshul rnam རྩོམ་རྣམ།
wa shur ར་ཤུར།
ye shes mtsho ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ།
yum skyabs rgyal ཡུམ་སྐྱམས་རྒྱལ།

CHINESE TERMS

Chaidamu 柴达木
Hainan 海南
Lifan 力凡
Qianjiang 钱江
Qinghai 青海
Rongwie 荣威
Tanggu 塘谷
Tongde 同德
Wuyangbentian 五羊本田
Zhaxijiancuo 扎西尖措